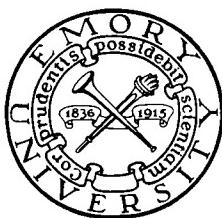




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ALLAN BRECK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE SUBALTERN,” “COUNTRY CURATE,” &c.

—This man's brow, like to a title-page,
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ALLAN BRECK.

CHAPTER I.

THE course of our history leads us to overleap a space of something more than two years, during which the last sparks of rebellion were everywhere quenched in Great Britain. Utterly broken both in heart and resources, the Jacobites had made no efforts during that interval to retrieve the fatal and complete defeat which they had sustained at Culloden. Of their leaders, many had perished under the hands of the executioner, — a still greater number were exiles in foreign lands, while some, still trusting to the fidelity of their tenants and followers, remained in hiding among the rocks and fast-

nesses of their native country. The people, again, after suffering the extremity of military exaction, were beginning to recover, to a certain degree, from its effects, and the labours of tillage and pasture, which had too long been interrupted, were partially renewed. Nevertheless, Scotland was far from exhibiting even yet the spectacle of a nation at rest within itself, or rejoicing in the protection of a mild, though strong Government ; for the traveller, whithersoever he directed his steps, might behold, in mansions deserted and villages blackening in the sun, ample proof that society had not recovered its tone.

If such was the case even in the lowland districts, much more terrible, because much more frequent, were the marks of royal vengeance discernible among the straths and glens of the highlands. There was not a settlement belonging to the rebel clans which the sword and the flame had been permitted to pass over. Not satisfied with declaring the lands forfeited, and the chiefs and principal gentlemen outlaws, the armed ministers of justice,—if indeed the term can be used where order and justice were alike

forgotten,—had inflicted on the tenantry and labouring population unheard-of cruelties. Detachments of troops were sent abroad with express orders to pillage and destroy ; the cattle were driven off or wantonly slaughtered ; the shielings were committed to the flames ; the men, insulted, beaten, and forced to seek safety by wandering houseless among the hills, perished of hunger, while the very women, in more than one instance, were exposed to the grossest outrages. In a word, no species of violence which a commission of fire and sword even in the most barbarous times was understood to warrant, was omitted, till the very instruments of tyranny grew weary of their office, and ceased by degrees to exercise it.

In this fearful visitation it is scarcely necessary to state that the country of the clan Díarmid largely partook. There, as elsewhere, the crime of a mistaken loyalty was atoned for by the ruin of all classes who had been guilty of it ; and there, during many months, the ordinary business of life was suspended, because men knew not whether they would be permitted to reap the fruits of their own industry.

But partly through the management of Fergus —partly because the thirst even of vengeance cannot hold out for ever,—a milder and more politic mode of procedure was at length adopted. Of the guilt of the chief no doubt could be entertained. He had led his clan in the rebellion, and he was known to have done so. He was therefore, being beyond the reach of personal punishment, declared a traitor, and his lands escheated to the crown. Nevertheless the lands were neither transferred by grant, nor disposed of by sale, to any other proprietor, but a commission was appointed to receive the rents, which were handed in, like other revenues arising from taxation, to the treasury. Finally, an agent or steward was nominated, on whom the charge of superintending such collections should devolve, and who in his general dealings with the tenantry was understood to supply the place, and take upon himself the duties, of a proprietor or landlord.

At the period when our history recommences, all these events had befallen; and the inhabitants of the strath, resuming their customary occupations, were living in a state of compa-

rative quiet. Of the agent of the Government they saw but little, for they were, generally speaking, punctual in their payments, and he did not consider it necessary to visit them too frequently. Nor was this all. While they struggled hard to fulfil the conditions on which they were severally permitted to retain their farms, the feuars were not unmindful of the necessities of him in whom all their affections may be said to have centred. A double rent was regularly collected. Mac Diarmid was a fugitive and proscribed, a stranger at a foreign court, and destitute of all ostensible means of sustenance. His clan could not permit him to appear there otherwise than as became his high station : the consequence was, that acting under the control of his representative, Fergus of Ardmore, they transmitted to Paris, at the accustomed seasons, all that they had been wont to pay to his ancestors ; and if they individually endured hardships to which they had heretofore been unaccustomed, they found consolation in the idea that he at least was safe, and in easy circumstances.

It was on a mild and balmy day in Novem-

ber, when winter put on, as it were, the livery of autumn, that Fergus, entering the little boudoir in which his daughter usually sat, proposed that they should walk together as far as Glenarroch. “ We have seen nothing of your aunt for some time, Marcella ; and though her manner be the reverse of gracious, and her prejudices absolutely monstrous, we must not forget that she is our kinswoman, and deserves our pity. You will not, I am sure, refuse to second me in another attempt to break down the barrier which circumstances have thrown up between us.”

“ On the contrary,” exclaimed Marcella, rising as she spoke, “ there is nothing that I would not do to convince my aunt that on our side, at least, the same kind feeling prevails that ever did. I will be with you in a moment.”

“ And besides,” continued Fergus seriously, “ there is a matter concerning ourselves alone, which I am anxious to discuss with you ; and we shall probably be less liable to interruption during our ramble than here.”

“ Whatever you wish to communicate to me, my dear father, I am ready to receive.

But you look grave and thoughtful: there is no bad news, I trust—no chance of a renewal of those frightful scenes which we witnessed a year ago."

"I hope not," replied Fergus, still preserving a fixed solemnity of countenance: "indeed, I have no reason to fear that—at least, in its extremity. Yet there are difficulties around us which may prove serious enough, unless we can fall upon some effectual means of dispelling them. But go, and get your cloak; I will walk on, and you can overtake me as soon as you are ready."

Fergus quitted the little apartment as he spoke; and, while Marcella made haste to equip herself, strolled leisurely towards the bottom of the avenue. His step was without buoyancy, and his air and general manner were those of a man on whose mind a load of care bore heavily. Indeed, his daughter had observed, that, during some weeks past, his usual exhilaration of spirits had deserted him. Now she could not surmise any adequate cause for this change. No doubt the state of the clan was abundantly distressing, and the prospects

both of chief and followers were black enough; but neither the one nor the other could, as far as her inquiries enabled her to discover, be accounted more melancholy than they had long been. Her anxiety, therefore, on his account, had become, of late, very great; and she now hurried, not without a painful sense of some impending calamity, to overtake him.

Fergus had reached the gate, and was descending the eminence on which Ardmore is situated, when the light step of his daughter following close behind, caused him to turn round. He smiled, but it was languidly, as he observed an expression of deep dejection in her countenance; and, taking her arm through his, endeavoured to rally her on her needless apprehensions. But his affected gaiety only increased the chill that was already at her heart, and she hastened to put an end to it.

“*There is some secret cause of sorrow, I am sure,*” said she; “*yet you would have me believe the reverse. I have seen it long, and now, I pray you, tell me the worst; for any thing is better than suspense.*”

“ Nay, Marcell,” replied her father, “ you take the matter too seriously. We are in trouble, I admit ; in trouble, not on our own account so much as on that of others ; though, in truth, anything which tends seriously to affect the peace of our poor neighbours, must at the same time affect ours. But tell me, what think you of the steward ? Mac Alpine is not a bad man, after all, is he ?”

“ He has, at least, behaved equitably towards us, and we are so far bound to speak well of him.”

“ I don’t allude to his public conduct, Marcell ; that, as you justly observe, has been as mild as the circumstances of the case would warrant. Indeed, I am aware that he has incurred some censure in quarters where he would least of all desire to be censured. However, that is not the question before us. I speak of him as a man, not as the agent of Government—as a gentleman of good family and connexion in the country. Duart is a pretty place ;—you have seen it, I think ?”

“ No, never ; and of the proprietor, both

you and I have seen too little to be able to form any judgment as to his personal merits."

"I cannot agree with you, Marcellly. He has been repeatedly our guest; and I must say, that I, for one, never observed, either in his manner or conversation, any thing but what I could admire. He is a Whig, it is true, and a Presbyterian; but there are many excellent Whigs and Presbyterians in the world; and he seems to me to be one of them."

"Very likely, my dear father," replied Marcellly, with a laugh; "I have no doubt he is all that you say, and I will add my testimony to yours if you wish. But how long have you learned to admit, that a Whig and a Presbyterian could be tolerated?"

"I tell you what, Marcellly," replied Fergus sharply; "we live in times when prejudice or principle, call it which you may, must in some degree shake hands with expediency. I say, that Whiggery and Presbyterianism may not be, after all, the cursed things that we take them for: at all events, in Duart's case they wear their least unbecoming garments. Duart possesses great influence with Macullamore: I have rea-

son to think, that if he could be brought to interfere in the matter, the outlawry might be removed from our young chief, and the country brought back to what it was ere that unlucky landing took place. Don't you think that such a consummation is greatly to be wished?"

"Do I think so!" exclaimed Marcella, her eyes glistening as she spoke. "Is there on earth a consummation which I more earnestly desire. Could Duart be brought to effect that, then, indeed, I would join heartily in his praises, Whiggery and Presbyterianism notwithstanding."

"Well," observed Fergus, after a long pause, "I expected no less from you. Now listen, while I make you acquainted with one or two circumstances besides. You are aware of the great trouble that I have taken, and the numerous hardships which the tenantry have undergone, for the purpose of at once meeting the demands of Government and maintaining Mac Diarmid abroad. You know as well as I, that there is not a man among them that would withhold life itself, did duty demand the sacrifice:—you see how they live, and you

have a heart to feel for them, even while accomplishing the great object of their wishes. But the worst remains to be told. All this trouble is incurred, all these sacrifices have been made to no purpose. They cannot supply the double drain; and, as Mac Diarmid's maintenance is with one and all the first object of consideration, they are falling fast into arrear with Duart. How is this to end?"

Fergus paused, as if waiting for a reply; but Marcella could make none, farther than by expressing a hope, that the case might not be so lamentable as her father apprehended.

"Lamentable, child!" interrupted he in a hurried tone, "I tell you, the case is desperate! Not fewer than six of them are half a year behind with their payments, and Duart, the mere agent of a merciless Government, cannot, and dare not, afford them farther time. He has already exceeded the powers granted by his commission, and must answer for it at his own personal peril. It was only yesterday that I received from him a communication to the effect, that the law must take its course, and that, if the rents due last term be not forth-

coming this day week, an ejectment will certainly issue. Now think of that. Not only will our unfortunate neighbours be cast out to starve, but Mac Diarmid himself becomes a beggar in a foreign country, while strangers light their fires on hearths which, for six hundred years, have never afforded warmth to any race except our own. Is there not enough here, Marcella, to render both you and me, and all who love the name, sad enough?"

"I admit it, my father," replied Marcella dejectedly; "and what is more, I know not how the evil is to be averted. You said but now, that Mac Alpine was a merciful man: surely he will not carry these threats into execution—surely he will forbear to strike, at least, till some farther efforts be made to avert the necessity of striking at all?"

"Daughter!" replied Fergus gravely, "Mac Alpine has already forborne to strike much longer than we had any right to expect. If he continue to exercise towards us a clemency which is both dangerous and inconvenient to himself, we must not expect him to do so gratuitously. We must give him something in

exchange for all this forbearance ; or, if the truth must be spoken, we must bribe him to forbear."

" Be it so, my dear father," exclaimed Marcella ; " and let me, too, contribute my share towards the furtherance of a work so holy. There are those few jewels which came to me from my mother — there is the old brooch, which I value more than all the rest — take them, and apply them to a use more worthy by far than the adornment of this poor person. I shall never lament a sacrifice which has contributed in any way to avert so dire a calamity."

" You are a good girl, Marcella," replied her father, as he pressed her hand in his ; " and, did the necessities of the moment require, I would not hesitate to take you at your word. But your jewels are useless here. Duart is wealthy ; he neither needs nor covets such an addition to his stores ; and, were it otherwise, I am afraid that your jewels would go but a little way in appeasing his cupidity. Besides, were these trinkets of value sufficient to make

good present deficiencies, where are we to derive our funds in case of a renewal of such difficulties? and that they will come again is just as certain as that they have befallen now. No: if we gain over Duart at all, it must be by such a bribe as shall render him ours for ever; and then we shall not only guard ourselves against a repetition of these inconveniences, but secure his great interest in Mac Diarmid's favour.—Mac Alpine is an agreeable man, Marcellly, is he not?"

" Humph!" replied Marcellly,—“that he desires to be considered so, is evident enough; but whether he succeeds or not, may depend upon the tastes of other people."

" He is a handsome man, too," continued Fergus, without appearing to notice his daughter's manner while speaking. " There was a time when the Western Highlands could have scarcely produced his equal in any manly or warlike exercise. Don't *you* consider him handsome?"

" Why no," replied Marcellly, laughing again: " what he might have been twenty or thirty

years ago, I cannot pretend to judge; but at present, I should certainly not call him handsome."

" Well, well, my love, he is, what is much more to the purpose, possessed of unlimited power in this country, which he is not indisposed to exercise in our favour. It is surely worth our while to conciliate him if we can, even though to do so may require, on our parts, one or more serious personal sacrifices. Besides, he is a good man, Marcellly, and would make any woman happy as his wife. Don't you think so?"

" Nay, sir," replied Marcellly, in the same merry mood as before; " I make no doubt whatever of that: only I should like to know who the happy woman may be, whom Mac Alpine of Duart designs so far to honour;—that is, supposing always that he has made you his confident?"

" You make somewhat too light of a very serious matter," replied Fergus; " for it is exactly on the behaviour of the woman whom he has chosen to honour, that the prosperity or ruin of our race depends. There is a person,

unquestionably, not remotely allied to ourselves, whom he *is* desirous of taking to wife, and whose union with him would at once disperse the present cloud, effectually hinder its return, and secure the best offices of Duart himself and of his powerful patrons. Is there a woman bearing the name, that would hesitate, think you, to wed the man who could throw such a shield of protection over her family and kindred?"

Marcelly looked at her father, whose eye fell under her glance like that of a culprit detected in the commission of a crime by the party whom he is in the act of injuring. The blood rushed to her cheeks, and, without being fully conscious of the movement, she withdrew her arm from his. She essayed to speak, but her tongue clove, as it were, to the roof of her mouth, and for several seconds they walked on, independently and in silence. By-and-by, however, Marcelly recovered her self-command, and replaced her hand on her father's arm: after which, she drew her mantle more closely round her throat, and said:—

"I trust that no such ungenerous proposal

will ever be made to a female even remotely connected with us, as that she should sacrifice herself—in that manner, at least—for the welfare of the clan. If by shedding their blood, they might serve their chief, or advance the prosperity of their kinsmen, there are, probably, few who would hesitate to lay their heads upon the block; but to demand from any one that she should undergo what is worse than a thousand deaths!—no!—of that our people can never be guilty! I know not, of course, to whom your allusions refer, but I beseech you not to advocate the cause of such a man as a suitor with any girl above the very lowest in the glen.”

Fergus made no reply, and they walked on in silence. Nor was the conversation renewed till they had reached Glenarroch, and were, by the servant in waiting, ushered into the parlour.

CHAPTER II.

BUT little occurred, during the brief visit of Fergus and his daughter at Glenarroch, of which it were worth while to give an account. They found their relative as cold and distant as ever, and their attempts to thaw the ice, by bringing on either explanation or discussion, entirely failed. Mrs. Mac Diarmid was polite—it is of the nature of her race to exhibit no marks of rudeness even to an enemy who places himself under the protection of their roof—but as to cordiality, or the semblance of cordiality, her manner exhibited no traces of it. It was to no purpose that Marcella endeavoured to lead her thoughts back to a contemplation of other and happier days, or

that Fergus bluntly charged her with giving way to prejudices unworthy both of herself and of her kindred. To the former, she scarcely condescended to make any reply, while the latter she met with a cold and haughty declaration, that she considered herself to be the best judge of her own conduct.

“ By the soul of Diarmid, sister,” exclaimed Fergus, “ it is enough to drive a man mad to hear you ! What ! you a judge of your own conduct ! No, by mine honour, any more than the maniac that sticks a paper cap upon his head, and wields a straw in his hand, is a judge of the reasonableness of his claim to be regarded as a sovereign prince. I can make many allowances for a mother’s partiality ; but to see you, after all that has come to your knowledge, persist in sacrificing your own peace, and the comfort of your kindred, for one who has proved himself to be——”

“ Fergus of Ardmore,” interrupted Mrs. Mac Diarmid, “ you were the early friend of my husband, and the husband of my sister ;— from you, therefore, I can endure much ; but even in your case, the claims of kindred may be

carried too far. I sacrifice no one ; I desire to sacrifice no one : it is a matter for my own consideration alone, whether I am to continue on terms of friendship with those who have driven my unhappy son into guilt and exile."

" Your unhappy son, sister ! Nay, but your desperate, incorrigible, black-hearted, forsworn traitor,—your mean, low-bred ruffian,—begotten God knows by whom, but certainly no spawn of Norman Mac Diarmid. Were there a spark of the high feeling about you for which your forefathers were distinguished, you would have disowned that hideous and debased miscreant long ago. Sister, sister, I am ashamed of you !"

" Go on, Ardmore," replied the lady calmly ; " it becomes you well to insult and revile the childless widow, particularly the widow of Norman Mac Diarmid, and the guardian of your daughter's youth ! I will not interrupt you again,—so go on."

The indignation of Fergus, instead of being allayed by this sally, became more violent than ever. " The what did you say ? the guardian of my daughter's youth ? Ay, to be sure, and

of her womanhood also. Let the Felon's Tower avouch it, and that night of horror which your ward, your beloved ward, spent there. Do you think I have been ignorant all this while of the part which you and yours played in that pleasant comedy? No, madam. Had I found you reasonable even now, that affair would have been forgotten; at least from me you should never have heard one syllable about it; but as it is, don't talk to me about the guardian of my daughter's youth. Go to, go to! choose fitter counsellors than old Elspeth of the Moss Darg, and fitter instruments than Red Ranald of the bloody hand; the one may betray you a second time, and the other is but a craven, with all his blustering and bullying. And now, Marcella, let us be going. Your aunt has wrung from me a secret which I had not intended to impart either to her or you;—but it matters not. She will probably take in better part the next advances that you or I make to her."

Mrs. Mac Diarmid's colour went and came while Fergus was speaking. She gasped once or twice for breath, and appeared on the point of fainting; but recovering herself by a strong

exertion, she regained her former placidity of countenance, except that her eye quivered, as if with suppressed passion.

“Have you done, Ardmore?” said she, so soon as her relative had ceased to speak. “Now hear me. I do not disavow the act with which you charge me as a crime. I was instrumental in carrying off your daughter, and would have united her, had I been able, to Allan Breck: ay, and in so doing,” continued she, her voice rising as she went on, and a flush of enthusiasm overspreading her pale cheek, “I would have secured her happiness, by uniting her to a man in every thing her equal, in some things her superior. Nay more; I would have given to the clan a leader more worthy of them than a poor cowardly intriguer, who stays at home when his kindred are in the field, and takes credit to himself because he succeeds in keeping his own lands, when those of better men are forfeited. All that I would have done had I possessed the power; and may the widow’s curse follow him that came in the way to mar the arrangement!”

“Now is not this enough to provoke the

patience of a saint?" exclaimed Fergus. "The woman first of all offers to me and mine the grossest outrages, and then boasts of having done so. Look you, Alice! I do not say that I renounce you,—because, let the widow of Norman act as she will, I cannot cast her off,—but from this hour you and I are to one another as strangers. If difficulties gather around you, I will deliver you from them if I can; but in the ordinary intercourse of life we meet as common acquaintances. Fare thee well!"

He rose as he spoke, and in spite of the entreaties of his daughter, refused either to retract what he had uttered, or to continue the conversation farther. Nor, to say the truth, was there much inducement held out either to him or Marcella to prolong their visit. Mrs. Mac Diarmid rose also, and standing aloof, looked upon her relatives with an eye in which, under the guise of perfect indifference, an expression of deep malignity shot forth. She bowed coldly, rejected the proffered embrace of her niece, and saw them depart without an effort to retard them. "Well, well," muttered she as their retiring figures darkened the hall-door,

“the next best thing to the attainment of our own wishes is to take vengeance on such as mar them. Go thy ways, Fergus of Ardmore, and rejoice in thine admirable management, but be assured that the schemes which thou art now so fondly maturing will come to nothing. Thou wouldest not control the wayward fancies of thy daughter, when, by so doing, thou mightest have rendered Allan—what he is not. Deal with her as thou wilt, she shall not be the instrument of aggrandizement to thee.”

In the mean while Fergus and his daughter were pursuing their homeward course under the influence of feelings widely different from those which agitated them earlier in the day. The former said little, for he manifestly laboured under strong excitement, and perhaps experienced something like regret that he should have been hurried into a disclosure of facts which he had intended to keep for ever concealed. The latter, though confounded and amazed by what she had heard, could not but acknowledge to herself that her father’s statements only confirmed suspicions which she had long, and, as it were, involuntarily harboured. She recalled to her

recollection a thousand occurrences which at the moment had scarcely attracted notice, but which, now that the truth was disclosed, stood forth as damning proofs that to the attempt upon her liberty, if not upon her honour, her aunt was from the first privy. She remembered the conversation on the loch-side, with the vague threats in which it terminated; the mysterious warnings with which her aunt had sought repeatedly to work upon her fears, and, above all, the manner in which the marked conversation that occurred just previous to her capture by the outlaws, was brought on and abruptly terminated. All these reminiscences came back upon her with painful distinctness, and caused her to wonder at the fatality with which, for so long a period, she could have shut her eyes to the truth. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that indignation at the detected treachery of one in whom she had reposed unbounded confidence, took unqualified possession of her mind. Marcella was more grieved than irritated ; she pitied her aunt to the full as much as she blamed her,—and as her thoughts wandered away from a contemplation of recent

wrongs to the kindnesses received in childhood, she could have wept at the sad contrast which the present times offered to the past.

While such was the channel in which the thoughts of Fergus and his daughter flowed, their conversation was not likely to be either very spirited or very interesting. A few observations, indicative rather of sorrow than of anger, were all that escaped from them ; and even these were accompanied by the expression of a hope that time might yet work a change in the feelings of their unhappy relative.

“ She is a strange being,” said Fergus ; “ a remarkable specimen, if I may venture to say so, of woman in her natural state, — of the female whose thoughts and considerations extend no farther than to her own offspring ; who sees in her child no fault, and who would render every obligation of moral right subservient to the gratification of her son’s wishes. There was a time when she knew and practised her duties to society at large as well as to her own household ; but in her case the natural affection, the *storgé*, as Parson Neil would call it, instead of becoming weakened by time, seems to have gathered

strength from year to year, till in it all other affections are swallowed up. And such a creature, too, for whom to make these sacrifices!"

"She is greatly to be pitied," replied Marcellly; "for in truth the feeling of which you speak appears with her to have degenerated into something like disease. To what, but to a positive aberration of intellect can we attribute a partiality so extravagant and so misplaced?"

"And yet, Marcellly, the fact that Allan is an object of distaste to all the world besides, is probably the real cause of his mother's extravagant fondness. They tell me that women love their idiot offspring more tenderly than such as possess the faculty of reason. Why should this be, except that Nature has wisely provided that creatures who are in themselves most helpless should retain the strongest hold upon the services—at least of their mother."

"True, sir," replied Marcellly; "but in this instance there is no natural helplessness. If Allan be friendless, he has rendered himself so by his misconduct; and his mother, not less than strangers, must feel that he but reaps the fruit of his own handiwork. I cannot under-

stand how the love even of a mother should be increased by the merited odium into which her son may have fallen."

" You are not a mother yourself, my love," replied Fergus, " otherwise you would be aware that mothers do not love by rule, or in strict accordance with right reason. A child may abandon a parent, a husband a wife, a father his son ; but a mother—no, there is no estranging a mother absolutely from her offspring. Nay more ; I believe that a mother cannot distinguish between the natural and the merited destitution of the object of her regard. It is enough that the lonely one looks to her for comfort and support ; she cannot, if she will, in any case refuse it. But here comes a messenger from Ardmore. What news, Hemish ? you seem in haste."

" She's comed, and she's waiting, your honour, and wants to see you immediately."

" Who's come, Hemish ?"

" Wha suld it be but Duart ? She's unco fashious, and says she's in a hurry."

" Duart !" exclaimed Fergus, and his countenance underwent a painful change of expres-

sion ; “this is earlier than I had anticipated. But it matters very little. Run on, Hemish, and tell Duart that I am coming, and that I will be with him in ten minutes. And now, Marcellly,” continued he, turning to his daughter, as soon as the gilly had passed beyond the reach of hearing, “the moment of painful trial has come. You remember the subject on which we conversed as we came hither.”

“Perfectly,” replied Marcellly diffidently ; “we spoke of Duart, and the possible chances of securing his good-will by the sacrifice of some unfortunate woman to be his wife. Was it not so ?”

“It was, my love,” replied Fergus : “but why speak of a union with Duart as a sacrifice ? He is not young, I admit ; neither is he old. A man retains the full vigour both of mind and body at fifty, and Mac Alpine Duart scarcely exceeds that age, if he exceed it at all.”

“His age would probably affect the question very little,” replied Marcellly, still anxious, as it appeared, to keep the conversation as general as possible, “were there aught in his appearance or manner calculated to attract. But you

need only look at the man to be aware that no woman is likely to give to him the hand of a willing bride. He is coarse, awkward, brutal. My dearest father, you will never urge any young person, for whom you have the smallest regard, to link her fate with his!"

"He is not very polished, I admit," rejoined Fergus; "and his figure has lost something of its original symmetry; but he is an honourable man, Marcelly, and bears among his dependants the character of a kind landlord. Besides, he possesses great interest, and will certainly exert it either to restore or to crush our name. And he is rich, my love—very rich."

"All that may be true, sir," replied Marcelly, "yet the sacrifice would be dreadful, were any person to whom he is positively distasteful compelled to receive him as her future husband; and I can conceive no moral inducement strong enough to bring about such a result."

"I trust that it is not so, my love," rejoined Fergus with increased solemnity; "I pray God that these may not be your deliberately formed convictions; for—for—to you the clan

look as alone capable of averting from them utter ruin."

"To me, my father!" exclaimed Marcella wildly, while the confirmation of her worst fears passed like a shot through her brain. "Oh no, not to me; it cannot be; you would never sanction such a device as that. You are my father, and I am safe under your protection."

"Safe, my love, you shall ever be," replied Fergus hastily—"safe from every thing that can hurt you, at least while I live,—yes, and secure against all violence, except that which your own lofty principle may impose upon your personal inclinations. Now hear me out, dear child, and then act as you see proper. I have told you but half the amount of our distresses. It is true that Caronvruack, Glenstrae, Dulater, and many others, have fallen behind in their payments, and that unless the arrears be made good within one week, they must all suffer ejection. How that act must affect Mac Diarmid, you know as well as I; but it will affect more than Mac Diarmid. *I* am personally responsible for my unhappy kinsmen. I could not refuse to give such security as the

agent of the Government required, and upon me that agent may legally come for the amount of their defalcations. If he do so, then are we ruined like the rest; and your father must seek in his old age a home among strangers, and subsist on such bounty as strangers may afford."

"And has it really come to this?" exclaimed Marcellly, speaking in a hurried manner. "Do not, do not say so. You are but trying me, my father: you are not personally mixed up in this matter; you would only see how far your child is or is not ready to relinquish more than life for your sake."

"Marcellly," replied her father, in a low but distinct tone, "have I ever wantonly trifled with your feelings?"

"No no, never," cried she; "and you will not trifle with them now. I have misunderstood you; you meant not what you said, or I mistook the import of your words."

"Neither the one nor the other, my love," replied Fergus; "I told you distinctly, and I repeat it now, that I am personally pledged for the defaulters, and that unless some means be found of satisfying Duart, you will be cast

out without a friend to the world, and I, perhaps, end my days in a gaol."

" And what means can be found ?" demanded she ; " I have already offered these poor jewels, I will give up my wardrobe, every thing—every thing, so that I can in any way contribute to avert this terrible blow. I will even pray my aunt to assist us in our distress ; and, deeply as she has wronged me already, she will not reject my prayer."

" My poor child, all this were useless. Your aunt possesses not the means, had she the inclination to serve us ; and as to your trinkets and wardrobe—No, Marcella—there is a means by which we might be saved—and there is but one."

" Name it !" exclaimed the girl, forgetting in the excitement of the moment, the hint which her father had already dropped ; " if there be aught by doing which I can avert this terrible calamity from you, God knows how cheerfully I will perform it."

" I will not take advantage of you, my sweet child," replied Fergus bitterly ; " and, so help me Heaven ! as I abstain from using

towards you even the semblance of compulsion. But I will tell you the condition on which Duart undertakes, not only to cancel all retrospective bonds, but to exert the influence which he is known to possess, in favour of the exile. He demands you for his wife. If you accept him as a suitor, our troubles end to-day : if you reject him totally, I have already told you the result."

" May God help me in this strait !" cried Marcella, as she raised her eyes wildly to Heaven. " Let him ask my life, and he shall have it on the instant ; let him demand me for a menial and a drudge, and I will become his slave ; let him shut me up in the darkest dungeon, where no human voice shall ever reach my ear, and I will submit without a murmur ; but, to become his wife—Oh no, no!—I cannot, dearest father—indeed, indeed, I cannot !"

" Then God bless thee, my child, and grant us fortitude to bear the ills that are unavoidable ! Thou shalt never again be urged by me—no, not if they immure me for life in the worst cell of Inverary. But for thee, Marcella—what is to become of thee ?"

“There is a Providence that careth for the orphan,” replied Marcelly, “and to that I could trust ; but my father to suffer captivity, I having the power to prevent it!—have mercy on me, Heaven, or my brain will burst !”

“Take time, my love, to consider the point. Though I spoke of to-day, I did not mean, that now, upon the instant, it was necessary to come to a determination one way or the other. Enough is done, if Duart be led to believe that he is not absolutely rejected ; and so far it may be possible to go, without committing yourself, even in your own eyes. Can you venture to see him ? Will you hear the proposals which he may have to make, and constrain yourself to act towards him, at least respectfully ?”

“Not now,” replied Marcelly, striving to regain something like composure, as they approached Ardmore ; “I could not see him now. It has come upon me so suddenly. I dreamed of this so little. Pray, pray feign some excuse—say that I am ill, agitated—any thing that you please ; only, as you value my reason, make no promise in my name. I will beseech

Heaven to guide me in this matter, and to-morrow we will speak of it again."

"Be it so, Marcella," replied Fergus, kissing her pale cheek, as they separated, "and may God direct you to do that which shall contribute most effectually, not to my happiness, but to your own!"

Marcella immediately hurried up stairs, that she might give vent, in her own room, to the agony with which she had hitherto struggled; while Fergus directed his steps to the drawing-room, where Mac Alpine of Duart impatiently awaited him.

CHAPTER III.

ON opening the door, Fergus beheld, seated on a sofa, at the upper extremity of the drawing-room, a man somewhat beyond the period of middle life, short of stature, brawny and muscular in his make, with red hair, a quick and fiery grey eye, and features which bore strong traces of indulgence in spirit-drinking : a vice much more common seventy years ago, than it is now. He was dressed in the lowland costume, for the trews and plaid were prohibited, and wore at his side a rapier, which appeared considerably to inconvenience him. There was an expression of irritability in his countenance, which appeared to be habitual to him, and was probably occasioned, or at least increased, by

the habits in which he indulged: and when he spoke, the tones of his voice were husky and harsh, like those of a person who speaks from beneath an ill-constructed mask. It was very evident that he was not pleased with having been kept some time in a state of expectation; for, though he made an effort to smile as he rose to return Fergus's salute, the eye falsified what a curl of the lips would have implied.

"I am glad to see you at last, Ardmore," said he gruffly; "I have waited nearly an hour, and began to fear that I should not be so fortunate as to find you, after all. Time presses, moreover; for I must reach Duart to-night, as the days are short."

"I regret that an accidental absence from home should have put you to inconvenience," replied Fergus coldly; "had I been warned of this visit, I should have made a point of being here to receive you."

"Ah, well, well, it don't much matter," replied Duart; "the country is pretty safe now, thanks to the vigorous proceedings of the Government: and though one would as soon be under cover a-nights, there is little to be ap-

prehended, at any hour, by a loyal subject within a few miles of Fort William. And as to warning you that I was coming, I couldn't very well do that, because I didn't know anything about the matter myself."

"Are you not from Duart, then?" asked Fergus.

"No, to be sure I arn't," replied Duart; "I told you that I was *going* there, but I said nothing about where I came from. However, there is no use keeping secrets among friends. The fact is, that I am direct from Inverary. I have been to see Macullamore, at his particular desire, and I just called in to tell you, that it will be impossible to postpone the ejectment beyond this day week, let happen what may. But this is not the worst of it: they are clamorous down yonder for their dues. I told them that the poor devils were pennyless, and that I doubted very much whether their surety would be able to supply the needful; but they didn't care for that. 'It can't be helped, Duart,' said Macullamore; 'the King must have his own, and if you don't find it for him, I must look out somebody else that will.'

So you see, Ardmore, what you have to expect."

" I never did expect from Macullamore any milder treatment," replied Fergus ; " but from you, Duart, I had hopes of more effectual intercession. I understood, when we parted, that you had not entirely laid aside the expectation of obtaining, at least a prolongation of the time. You possess great influence with the Lord Justiciary, and your petition might avail us much."

" Not as we stand now, Ardmore. What cares Macullamore for my entreaties anent people whom I can describe only as defeated rebels and pardoned traitors? If there was a tie of blood between us, then, indeed, the case were different. I could then say to the Justiciary, ' This is a matter that concerns myself. Your Grace is pleased to acknowledge, that I have done the State some service, and that I have not been adequately rewarded :—now I ask as a full compensation for all claims on my part, that my adopted kinsmen be restored to the Royal favour ; that all forfeitures be remitted, outlawries taken off, and things brought back

to their original order.' This I could do; and I take it upon me to aver, that if I did, there would not be an incumbrance on Mac Diarmid's lands within the space of one week. But at present, what can I urge?"

" You can represent the amount of devastation to which our lands were subjected, and the difficulty of restoring them all at once to anything like fertility."

" Well, and so I did; and what was the answer? ' The Mac Diarmids have ever been the bitterest enemies to the Protestant succession. They have suffered no more than other clans, and they have no right to expect greater leniency in our after dealings with them. Their payments must be made, and punctually too.' "

" You can urge the interest which you yourself feel in our affairs, and particularly in mine, with whom you have so long been on terms of familiar friendship."

" Why, man, they had me again there. ' What!' says Macullamore, ' you—honest Master Mac Alpine of Duart, as douce and upright a citizen as ever walked the Trongate of Glas-

gow—you on terms of familiar friendship with any of the proscribed race of Mac Diarmid ! The thing's impossible ! I 'll no' believe it !' And thereupon he passed to other matters, and left me to make the most of my claims of friendship and alliance with you, Ardmore. But, if I had been able to say to him, 'The thing is quite true, because Ardmore's daughter is my wife,' then we should have seen a very different conclusion to the affair. However, all this is foreign to the purpose of my present visit. I have merely to say, and God knows I say it with muckle sorrow, that delays will no longer be tolerated. The Commissioners are resolved to have their money within the week, should they be compelled to levy it at the point of the bayonet."

" And is there then no hope for us, Duart ? There was an alternative offered by you once ; is that irrevocably withdrawn ?"

" Not so, Ardmore," replied Duart, changing his hitherto flippant tone into one of serious interest ; " that alternative is still within your reach. But, after all that passed between us at a former interview, I cannot flatter myself that

it is likely to be embraced. Have you consulted the young lady on the subject?"

"I have," replied Fergus, with some difficulty commanding himself.

"And what says she?" asked the other impatiently.

"What a dutiful child might be expected to say. She has no will apart from that of her father—no ambition, except to save him and his from ruin."

"Humph!" ejaculated Duart; "I don't know exactly how to take that. I told you plainly, that I wouldn't have the girl if she gave herself to me on compulsion; for much as I love her, the hand of a maiden who weds because her father so commands, were but a poor present. I think that I could make her as happy as any man: I am sure that I possess both the means and the inclination to do so:—but then she must be mine freely, and of her own accord; there must be no force in the matter—no compulsion."

"Duart!" replied Fergus sternly, "I would not lay violence on my daughter's inclinations for ten times what you can offer, or I accept.

Whenever Marcella gives her hand to any man, it will be freely, and of her own accord. I make no engagement in her name ; but of this you may rest assured, that if she return a favourable answer to your suit, she will have been directed so to do by a better principle than that of obedience to the mandates of a tyrannical father."

" I believe you, Ardmore," replied his guest, walking quickly through the room as he spoke. " Marcella is a beautiful and a high-minded girl. I do believe that she would not yield to violence, were you the man, and I don't think you are, to offer it. Then I may look to obtain, not her hand only, but her heart also ? You think that she loves me for my own sake ?"

Fergus's brow lowered, and the blood mantled warmly in his cheek ; but he had long accustomed himself to control his passions, and he suppressed them now. He answered calmly, though not without a slight intonation in his voice indicative of something very nearly allied to scorn."

" I told you that I would make no promises,

nor enter into any engagements in my daughter's name. I said this with reference to her hand ; as to the state of her affections, of that I know nothing. But you are too well acquainted with the ways of the world to expect extravagant love in a girl of twenty, and too wise, I presume, to value it above its worth."

"True, true," replied Duart, stopping and eyeing the speaker with a keen and caustic glance ; "I am not quite so young as I once was. The days of romance are over with me, and I have no wish to see them renewed in my bride. But a man hale, healthy, not badly to pass in the world, and wanting six years of three score, may fairly expect that his wife shall regard him without aversion. I want no childish emotions ; give me respect, regard, and mutual confidence on which to found my hopes of happiness in a married state. Of these, I presume that you can assure me."

"I assure you of nothing, Duart, beyond a candid attention to your suit, and a disposition on Marcellly's part to think well of a man to whom her family are under serious obligations.

All beyond this you must accomplish for yourself, and I trust you will accomplish it."

"Be it so," replied Duart; "and how soon may I expect to be honoured with this interview? My business at home is not very urgent; I could delay my departure a few hours, provided your daughter would consent to see me on a subject of such vital interest."

"I am afraid that to-day, at least, it were useless to make the request. I parted from her not ten minutes ago, when she complained of severe indisposition, and I do not expect her to quit her chamber before to-morrow. If, however, you could arrange to sleep here to-night, in the morning, perhaps, she might be in a condition to enter upon the subject."

Duart hesitated for a few moments, as if considering how far it would be judicious to comply with this proposition. A shrewd and far-sighted man of the world, he was at no loss in surmising the true nature of Marcellý's indisposition, and the probability that any immediate proposal from himself would be received, under existing circumstances, unfavourably, tempted him to adhere to

his original plan of quitting Ardmore that day, and returning after an interval however brief. Time, on the other hand, was pressing. He had submitted to numerous delays already, of which the causes were manifestly to be sought for rather in the reluctance of the father to bring matters to a crisis, than in the natural shyness of the daughter ; and now that an opportunity offered of knowing his fate at once, he felt greatly disposed to take advantage of it. Besides, there was an interval of one week only between him and the completion of a threat which he had uttered too often not to have made up his mind to accomplish ; and his residence lay so remote from Ardmore, that to return thence, except for the purpose of superintending the ejection, would be attended with great inconvenience. On the whole, therefore, it appeared to him more prudent to run the risk of the lady's coldness, than to defer to another day that which might be done on the morrow. “ I consent,” he at last said, “ to your proposal, Ardmore. I will stay here to-night. You spoke of my knowledge of mankind but a short time ago ; it may not be extensive, but

it is sufficiently matured to give me a tolerably clear insight into the cause of your daughter's seclusion. She had not anticipated the discussion of such a subject as you this day brought before her : is it not so ?"

" I cannot deny it, Duart," replied Fergus ; " and we are bound to make great allowances for the feelings of young women to whom so grave a question is for the first time propounded. Marcella has led a secluded life here, as you know. She has never given the subject of marriage admission into her thoughts ; and if she be agitated now when it is suddenly brought before her, neither you nor I can be surprised. To-morrow, I trust, she will be more herself, and however your interview may terminate, I will engage that she affords it readily."

Having adjusted this matter to their mutual satisfaction, Fergus proceeded to issue orders for the accommodation, after the highland fashion, of Duart's horses and attendants. He then returned to his proposed son-in-law, and a plentiful repast of fish, moor fowl, and venison being shortly afterwards served up, the gentlemen spent the evening together in much appa-

rent cordiality. Fergus, who was at all times temperate, did not, however, exceed his customary libations ; and Duart, from what motive impelled it may be easy to surmise, was likewise sparing in his use of the magnum. The consequence was that the tête-à-tête came to an end at rather an early hour, and Fergus, having waited upon his guest to a chamber, withdrew to hold a few moments' conversation with his daughter, ere he lay down.

CHAPTER IV.

WORDS are wanting to describe the feelings of Marcella, when, bolting the door behind her, she found herself alone in her own apartment. For a moment or two she stood motionless, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy, while she endeavoured to look back upon what had passed between her father and herself as upon a hideous dream ; but by degrees the consciousness returned that there was no deception in the case, and that a terrible choice was submitted to her. Either she must prepare herself to witness the total ruin of her family, her own utter destitution, and, what was worse a thousand times, the subjection of her father to infamy and imprisonment, or—and her very reason tottered

while she strove to contemplate the alternative,—she must become the wife of a man whom she loathed as one loathes a noxious reptile. We have already had occasion to speak of Marcella as a girl possessed of more than the mental strength usually allotted to women; but this trial proved too severe for her. She threw herself upon the bed, buried her face in her hands, and gave vent to a passion of tears, the most bitter, because springing from the deepest and most troubled source, of any which had yet moistened her cheeks.

It was well for Marcella that nature found vent in this manner. Had the fountain of her tears refused to give forth its stores, there was a fire upon her brain which must have scorched it into madness. As it was, she rose, after a long interval of weeping, collected, and, comparatively speaking, resigned. Her first impulse directed her to fall down upon her knees, and implore the Giver of all good to direct her under her present difficulties. Her next proceeding was to look with a steady and composed eye upon the prospects which recent events had opened out to her. She saw, on the one hand,

that her father was beset with dangers from which, without her aid, he could not possibly deliver himself; that these dangers extended not to him only, but to the chief, to the principal families of the name, and, eventually, to the whole clan; in a word, ruin, absolute and irreparable ruin, impended over her race, and must, except one great individual sacrifice were made, crush them for ever. On the other hand, it was in her power not only to avert these calamities, but to restore to the country that prosperity and happiness which it was accustomed to experience long ago. Her chief looked to her for the removal of a ban which condemned him to eternal exile,—the fate of her clansmen, one and all, was involved in her decision,—and her father must prosper or suffer the extreme of misery, according as she should resolve to act. What a consideration was this! —yet how dreadful, how revolting the step which must be taken to avert it!

Marcella pondered long and painfully. “It is horrible, most horrible,” said she aloud. “To die were nothing,—for though life has been to me a source of many blessings, I am ready to

resign it cheerfully now, or at whatever moment he who gave may see fit to demand it. But to become the wife of him—of such a man as that ! O God ! give me strength even to think of it without losing my senses ! Yet if I refuse, what follows ? Have mercy upon me, gracious Heaven ! and direct me ; for in truth I know not how to act."

Though living in times of no ordinary trouble, and exposed in her own person to encounter many trying scenes, Marcella never passed a day of so much intense misery as this. Her food went away untasted, and even her nurse failed to cheat her into a transitory forgetfulness of the one harrowing idea that pressed upon her thoughts. It was thus till the customary hour of rest had returned, and the faithful menial, attentive only to the distresses of her child, still lingered in the chamber ; when a low knock at the door gave notice that some one demanded admission. Marcella heard the signal, and guessing by whom it was given, announced that she might be seen. In a moment the door opened, and

Fergus, with a countenance overshadowed with grief and anxiety, stood before her.

"Retire, Christian," said he to the nurse; "I wish to say a few words in private to your child. But be in waiting; I will call you again whenever you may be wanted."

The honest creature withdrew as she was desired, and the father and daughter were left alone together.

Had there been any indifferent spectator by, to observe the workings of Fergus Mac Diarmid's countenance, he would have seen there manifest traces of all the most distressing, as well as humiliating feelings that rankle in the human heart. There was profound and undisguised self-condemnation; there was wounded pride, lacerated affection; and anxiety, partaking in part of hope, in part of fear, as if the individual knew not whether he ought to desire the accomplishment of his own wishes, or its opposite. Nor did his manner fail to take its tone from the feeling which laboured in his overwrought bosom. Instead of the affectionate frankness which usually marked his deport-

ment towards his daughter, Fergus was conscious of a degree of irresolution, amounting almost to bashfulness, which withheld him from approaching her more nearly than the point which he had attained when first entering the room. In spite of her own sorrows, Marcella saw and pitied the distressing situation of her father. She advanced towards him, threw her arms about his neck, and leaning her head upon his shoulder, wept bitterly.

“ My best and most beloved child,” said he, pressing her to his bosom, “ I have never, till this moment, shrunk from your embrace ; yet it seems as if those tears were shed, and that kiss given, for the purpose of telling me how unworthy I am to possess such a daughter. Heaven’s blessing be upon thee, love, whatever fate may attend me or others ! ”

“ You have come, sir, to require my determination,” said she. “ Duart is your guest, and it is necessary that I should decide at once either to receive him as my future husband, or to reject him.”

“ It is not exactly so, my love,” replied Fergus, leading her towards a chair, and draw-

ing another for himself close to her's; "I do not require you to determine now, whether you will accept Duart or not; nay, I *require* nothing. All that I have to entreat of you is, that you will consent to receive from him a visit to-morrow morning, and that you will abstain from peremptorily prohibiting his mention at some future time, of the subject on which he is prepared to address you."

"I understand," replied Marcellly; "Duart will make to me to-morrow an offer of his hand, and I must not positively reject it. However odious he may be, however my own heart may revolt at the idea, I must permit him to go away with the impression on his mind, that there exists no insuperable bar to our union. Is it not thus that I am expected to behave?"

"God forgive you, Marcellly!" exclaimed Fergus, wringing his hands. "I expect and desire nothing from you but what your own conviction of duty—nay, of principle, may suggest. Reject him, if such be your pleasure; and, let the consequences be what they may, you shall never hear from me one syllable of reproach."

“I know it, my father,” replied she; “I know that, even in your solitary dungeon, you would breathe only prayers for the happiness of your child; but could that child be happy with the terrible reflection continually before her, that she doomed her father to captivity? No, no, no! — You tell me there is but one means of escape left for you, and that I can secure it. I will secure it — I will plight my troth to this abhorred man, and I will pray to God to remove me hence, ere the day arrive on which that fatal vow must be accomplished.”

“Never, Marcella!” exclaimed Fergus, rising, and striding with a hurried step across the room. “May I, and all that bear the name, perish everlastinglly, ere you be required to make such a sacrifice! I will go to Duart on the instant, tell him that you never can be his, and prepare myself to meet, with becoming fortitude, whatever destiny fate has prepared for me.”

He made a movement towards the door, but was instantly detained by his daughter.

“You shall not go, my father,” said she

calmly ; “sit down, and hear me out. I am determined to make this sacrifice, whether you consent to it or not. I do not conceal from you, that death, in its most hideous form, were a thousand times more welcome ; but that matters not. It shall never be said by others, my own conscience shall never tell me, that I shrank back from my duty, no matter how arduous ; or refused to save my father, no matter at what cost to myself. But this favour I do beseech you to grant. Obtain from Duart a solemn promise, that if he be accepted, he shall not require the fulfilment of my engagement under the lapse of a year and a day. There is a charm in that mystic number of months and weeks—at least our bards tell us so—and I would fain, like Jephtha’s daughter, prepare myself for the altar. Do this, and I promise you to receive your suitor as becomes me.”

“I would not refuse your request, Marcella, could I bring myself to believe, that at the end of the period specified, you would be able to overcome, even partially, that disgust of which at present you make no secret. But

I cannot doom you, even after an interval of a year, to suffer that worst of all living deaths, a union with a man whom you abhor."

"Leave the result to God," replied Marcellly, "only do as I require you. We cannot tell what changes may occur within the lapse of twelve months, and of this you may rest assured, that these months shall be devoted by me to the single task of preparing myself for my fate. But take care that there be no juggling on his part. Loathing and abhorring the man, I cannot divest my mind of suspicions, that he promises in this matter more than he will be able to perform. See that you are released from the chains that shackle you, ere I permit worse chains to be thrown around me."

"Now may Heaven forgive me, if I yield so far to fortune as to obey your wishes, my daughter, in this matter. I will hold with Duart such a conversation as you suggest. No power on earth shall, indeed, prevail with me, either directly or indirectly, to commit you; but the promise for which you stipulate shall be obtained, otherwise Duart shall not be

permitted to see you. Yet even thus, my love, I would not have you contract an engagement which you may find it impossible in the end to fulfil. Speak to him of your indisposition to determine hastily on such a point; tell him that you must weigh the matter well, ere you can determine; permit him to visit you again, and give him hopes—but contract no positive engagement. This, I trust, will serve our purpose in the mean time; and while there is a future before us, our affairs are not absolutely desperate."

"No, my father," replied Marcella bitterly, "I cannot at once offer myself a burnt offering to Moloch and play with the fire which is to consume me. To-morrow, if at all, I plight my troth to Duart; but it will be on the express condition, that never again, till our bridal day arrives, is he to offend my sight with his detested presence. That bargain I shall make for myself. It is for you to stipulate that the interval shall be allowed, and that in the mean while my family is freed from its bonds. Let this be done, and I am—not contented, but resolved. Let us fail in obtaining these condi-

tions, and my heart may break,—but I cannot, will not be his.”

“ It shall be as you desire, my love,” replied Fergus rising, and kissing her cheek ; “ yet think of the matter again. To-morrow morning early I will see you, and if your resolution have undergone a change, do not hesitate to say so. No doubt you may, by this single act, become the preserver of your race, and children yet unborn will speak of you as such : but not even for that consideration would I have you give up what is of infinitely more value in my eyes—your own peace of mind, your own self-respect. Duart is not without his failings ; but he is, I believe, a good man in the main ; and custom will doubtless reconcile you to blemishes which are now looked at through the medium of prejudice. If you think so, and believe that you can be happy as his wife, your father and your kindred, whom you have saved, will bless your union ; but if not, let no consideration for us induce you to take a step which is, you know, irrevocable, and——”

“ Enough ! enough ! my father,” replied Marcellly hurriedly ; “ I desire to hear no more

on the subject. My mind is thoroughly made up. I am ready to sacrifice myself; but I cannot and will not attempt to hide from you, that the sacrifice is fearful. Let this much suffice: but if the assurance that my determination shall never be revoked tend, in any degree, to smooth your pillow, sleep soundly; for I have spoken, and will not recall my words."

Marcella embraced her father as she concluded this speech, and kissed him with her wonted affection. She besought his blessing too, which was given with more than his accustomed earnestness; and she saw him quit the room without shedding a tear. Nor is this all: she spoke cheerfully to her nurse while the latter assisted her to undress, and, having solemnly commended herself to the care of Heaven, laid her head upon the pillow, and slept soundly.

CHAPTER V.

How different are the sensations of the victim and the executioner, when the one suffers innocently, and the other, even though urged on by what he conceives to be a stern necessity, stands prepared to immolate the very being whose image lies nearest to his heart ! While the slumbers of Marcellly were light and refreshing, and an approving conscience conjured up only dreams of blessings to come, Fergus paced his chamber backwards and forwards with an uneasy tread, and pondered, till every pulse in his forehead beat as if it would burst the skin, upon the present condition and probable prospects of his family. It was to no

purpose that he looked back with something like remorse on the measures which he had been led to adopt, in strict accordance with what he believed to be his duty. The time for consideration was gone ; and in vain the idea occurred, “ What if I had allowed things to take their natural course ? Was I forced to involve in ruin so many persons, the best blood of the clan—ay, and my own family besides—in order to secure to one man the means of supporting himself as a gentleman at the French court ? Can this be required at my hands, or at the hands of any one ? ” We do not mean to convey an insinuation that Fergus answered these questions in the negative. On the contrary, there was about him, even in this his dark hour of trial, all that devotedness of soul and feeling which taught the Highlander of the seventeenth century to regard his chief’s honour as his own, and to account every personal privation as light, provided only it had the effect of relieving the head of his family from distress. But it were absurd to deny that amid this excitement of high principle, the recollection of his daughter’s fate came

from time to time over him, like a cloud over the face of the full moon when the corn is ripe. “ But for her I could have endured all that their malice might think fit to lay upon me. They might cast me into prison, seize and alienate my property, or take away my life : I could have suffered all without a murmur :— but Marcella,—who would protect her were I taken away, and she a beggar ? No, no, it must not be ! I know that the alternative is fearful ; but better that she should drag on ever so dull an existence as the wife of that beast Duart, than depend for her daily food upon the charity of strangers. Heaven, that reads my heart, can tell how reluctantly I lay this load upon her ! But there is no avoiding one evil except by incurring a greater.”

It was thus that Fergus summed up a long and anxious train of argument, in which he strove to set himself right in his own eyes, and, as it were, before the world. Yet the uneasiness which still lay upon his thoughts demonstrated, that the conclusion scarcely satisfied himself. Nevertheless, like other men who feel that they are committed beyond the power

of escape, he struggled hard to create a persuasion, that his case was not without its palliatives. He looked at Duart's situation and character through the medium rather of his wishes than his knowledge. Duart was wealthy; he was not cruel; he was not mercenary; he was not ungenerous. What if he were somewhat addicted to the pleasures of the table,—was not that propensity of common occurrence throughout Scotland? And as to his irritability,—the best tempers were generally those which threw off their humours at once, instead of nursing and sustaining them in secret. Why should he not make Marcellly happy, after all? True, she loved him not,—nay, she abhorred him: but then Marcellly was a sensible girl, and that which duty enjoined she would certainly perform, in defiance both of prejudice and passion. And above all, Marcelly's affections were as yet disengaged. Of that fact Fergus was certain, and he thanked God that the case was so. Still there was that in the reflections of Fergus Mac Diarmid this night which effectually drove sleep from his pillow: he saw the lamp expire in its socket, and

the feeble glimmer of the dawn break through his curtains, without having once closed an eye.

Fergus rose from his bed, and throwing open the window, sat down beside it, in order that the morning breezes might cool the blood which bounded through his veins fiercely and feverishly. He looked out upon the loch, as it heaved gently in the calm, and rolled its bright billows one after the other against the rock beneath him. There was a gloom upon the bosom of the waters—for as yet the twilight glanced only along the summits of the far-off hills—and except when, from time to time, a sea-bird flew screaming from its perch, there was not a sound to mingle with that of the breaking waves. Fergus experienced the full effect of a scene so holy and so tranquillizing. Insensibly his fever left him; he breathed more freely than he had done; his thoughts took a calmer tone, and raised themselves involuntarily to Heaven. “God’s will be done,” said he, speaking aloud, “and may we submit to it as becomes us!”

“Amen!” replied a deep-toned voice, which,

when once heard, there was no mistaking ; and immediately there emerged from beneath the shade of a clump of elms, the figure of a man, which advanced directly beneath the window.

“ Is it you, Parson Neil ?” exclaimed Fergus : “ this is no safe harbour for you at present. We are not alone ; and if those who are our guests chance to discover you, we may both, perhaps, live to repent it. For Heaven’s sake withdraw, ere the people begin to move.”

“ Not till I have had half an hour’s conversation with you, Ardmore. I am aware that you are not alone, and I know who is your guest. Still I must see you. If it be unsafe for me to go to you, come you to me. I will wait in the Fumart’s cave ; and I pray you to lose no time in joining me there.”

The speaker made no pause to receive an answer, but, passing rapidly under the shade of the tall trees, the outline of his form was visible only for a moment, and then disappeared.

The appearance of Parson Neil, even at this hour of the morning, under almost any circumstances different from those which immediately surrounded him, would have excited neither

surprise nor uneasiness in the mind of Fergus Mac Diarmid. A sort of half fugitive,—that is to say, residing among his flock partly under cover, partly by connivance, because distrusting, perhaps unfairly, the act of indemnity which gave confidence to others, it was no unusual matter for the good Parson to pay his confidential visits under the cloud of twilight: and being a man of active habits, the gloom of the morning was neither less acceptable in itself, nor less frequently made use of, than the shadow of the departing day. Situated as he now was, however, the mind of Fergus misgave him. His reasoning, sophistical at the best, had scarcely led him to believe that he was guilty of no crime in immolating his only child for the benefit of his more remote kindred. He dreaded, he scarce knew why, that the Parson was about to lay before him other and stronger proofs, that the conclusion was absolutely iniquitous; nevertheless, he did not hesitate as to granting the interview required. He hurried on his clothes, and stealing softly down stairs, passed, with a troubled step, across the lawn, and followed where the other

had led, down a narrow and steep cut in the face of the rock.

The Fumart's cave was a reft or fissure in the face of the rock, accessible from above by a track so precipitous, and at the same time so imperfectly marked, that a stranger might pass and repass along the edge of the terrace a thousand times without discovering so much as its commencement. This, after winding round a crag, which jutted considerably farther over the abyss than its fellows, conducted the adventurous visitant to the cave itself ; which, though at low water it hung, as it were, in air, its foundation being fairly undermined by the washing of the waves, lay, when the tide was up, scarce a couple of feet above the level of the sea. During spring tides, indeed, when the wind blew strong from the west, it was no uncommon event to find the cave half filled with water ; for though the volume of sea rolled up, rarely passes in these salt-lochs its customary level, the spray would break in freely, and leave large pools behind. The consequence was, that even at this period of excessive hazard to person and property, the

Fumart's cave was but little resorted to as a place of hiding. For a start, indeed, as the phrase went, it might serve the purpose of the fugitive well enough; but no one could venture to establish his home there, knowing, as the people of the country did, that on the first occurrence of a tempest, the chances were even whether the individual seeking shelter might not find in it a watery grave.

When Fergus Mac Diarmid reached the point whence the mouth of the cave became visible, he ascertained that the tide was at the full, and the sullen sweep of the waters, only a foot or two beneath the giddy precipice, along the side of which he passed, sounded in his ear like the cry of a bird of bad omen. Accustomed as he had been from childhood, to traverse the most perilous of the paths by which the hills are crossed, he felt, on the present occasion, that his brain was not equal to the hazard of a direct and protracted gaze upon the gulf below. This might, perhaps, be owing to the sleepless night which he had passed—or possibly the extreme agitation of mind under which for some time back he had laboured, rendered his nerves

unsteady ; but whatever the cause might be, it is certain that while traversing the few feet of open gallery which led from the last curvature of the zigzag descent to the mouth of the cave, he would not have ventured, for all the wealth of the Indies, to look deliberately down upon the loch. Nevertheless, he shrank not from the adventure, but keeping his eyes fixed upon vacancy, gained, without a stumble, the strange trysting-place which Parson Neil had appointed.

Within a recess of dark whinstone, overarched from above, and presenting on the seaward side a bulwark, considerably elevated above the level of the cleft, sat Parson Neil ; his figure, even when standing upright, being entirely concealed, though he might, through crevices on either flank, observe the approach of an intruder. A low fire of turf burned beside him ; for the night had been cold, and hardy as he was, the Parson found it necessary to guard against the effects of exposure, while a bundle of heather, rolled up in the far corner, marked the spot on which he had made his bed. He moved aside as Fergus entered, in

order to give to him the most commodious resting-place which the cavern afforded ; and the latter having taken his seat, no time was wasted ere the business of the interview began.

“ This is well,” said Parson Neil ; “ I rejoice sincerely that we have met thus early. It may not, perhaps, be too late to convince you that you are about to do that of which, if you go forward with your scheme, you will never, to the day of your death, cease to repent.”

“ What do you mean ?” demanded Fergus ; “ you speak in riddles, and I am no OEdipus to read them.”

“ I don’t think an OEdipus is required in the present instance,” replied the Parson. “ You know perfectly well what you meditate, and so do I. You imagine that it will end advantageously for all concerned ; I am certain that it will not.”

“ Speak out at once, Neil Macpherson,” replied Fergus ; “ this is sheer trifling, and I am in no mood to bear with trifling now. What know you of my plans ? and what reason have you to suppose that they will lead to other than

a favourable result, both in my own case, and in that of others?"

"If I had no other sources of information," replied the Parson, "common rumour has been too busy with your plans to leave any one in doubt touching their object; but I will not conceal from you, that I derive my information from more authentic sources. You intend to marry your daughter to Mac Alpine of Duart, and you anticipate from that ill-assorted match a deliverance of the clan from all its troubles. I tell you, on the contrary, that the whole device is cruel, unjust, and must, in every point of view, end in disappointment. It must be abandoned, or worse may come of it."

"I will not pause to inquire by what right you presume to scrutinize so closely arrangements which do not concern you," replied Fergus sternly; "nor will I insist upon your making me acquainted with the source through which your information is derived. It is sufficient if I tell you that I consider myself to be the best judge of the rectitude of my own conduct; and that I will seek advice from

others, only when I find reason to distrust my own judgment."

" Fergus Mac Diarmid," replied the Parson, his voice faltering slightly, so as to make manifest that he felt the unkindness implied in his companion's tone and manner, " we have known each other too long, and trusted each other too far, to take light offence, as if we were acquaintances but of yesterday. I do not pretend to any right of scrutiny over your proceedings — though I did flatter myself that the interest which I take in the welfare of you and yours, would have excused more than my present procedure. But it seems that I over-estimated the hold which I really possess upon your confidence and friendship."

" Not a whit, my dear Parson," replied Fergus, instantly recovering himself; " I am sure that you have never said or done aught that was not meant to benefit your friends ; and in the present instance, I readily believe that your motives are excellent. But I am so situated, that the power of weighing between right and wrong, scarcely remains to me. The step which

I propose to take may be a desperate one; but how can I avoid it?

“When your own conscience tells you that you have ceased to calculate the moral tendency of a proposed exploit, you need brief argument from me to convince you, that the exploit is at least of doubtful propriety,” replied Neil. “But it is not more of the moral tendency of this particular act than of its sound policy that I would speak. What proof do you possess that Mac Alpine is able to fulfil his part of this strange compact? Have you more than his bare promise to build upon?”

“Unquestionably,” replied Fergus, “I have the universally-received conviction, that his interest with Macullamore is all but boundless. Is he not indebted to that interest for the situation which enables him to control the destinies of so many men better born and better bred than himself; and have we not reason to believe that it is equal to more than this? Besides, he is prepared, at his own personal cost, to pay up those arrears which weigh us down to the ground; and for the future—he stands pledged

to render it such as we desire ; otherwise, our bargain is at an end."

" How so ?" replied Neil. " If I understand your daughter aright, and I do not hesitate to tell you, that from herself I learned last night the substance of your parting interview, she agrees to plight her faith to Duart on the single condition, that he delivers you from your difficulties, and engages to avoid her presence for a year and a day. Now, from your immediate difficulties Duart may be able to set you free. He may promise, moreover, to obtain restitution to the exile, and he may be sincere in his desire of effecting that object. But are his means equal to the end ? Remember, that this is a matter on which you must have other security than the bare allegation of one contracting party, supported though that be by the voice of common rumour."

" Neil Macpherson," replied Fergus, " we are arguing this point to little purpose. There may be truth in what you say, and Duart may be deceiving me throughout ; but we have no right to assume that the case is so without proof. And as to seeking from him other se-

curity than his word of honour as a gentleman, where would be the advantage? — he would doubtless treat such an attempt with the scorn which it merited, and break off our contract at once.”

“ And you would deliberately sacrifice your daughter’s peace of mind on the vague, possibly the idle expectation, that the agent of the Duke of Argyle is possessed of influence enough to twist the prejudices of the King’s government to his own humours ! Have a care what you do, Ardmore. Even with proofs — the fullest proofs—that such confidence is not misplaced, the benefits to be obtained would, in my opinion, be too dearly purchased. You have no right, before God or man, to barter away your only child for any consideration whatever—least of all to slaughter your victim first, and then to hope for the reward of your cruelty afterwards. No, no ; this were to take a leap in the dark with a vengeance.”

“ Have mercy upon me, Neil.” exclaimed Fergus bitterly. “ There is before me such a choice as would drive most men mad ; and even I can scarce contemplate it and preserve my

senses. You talk of sacrificing Marcella. I admit it; but sacrificed she must be one way or the other. Which is best,—that she should be cast out like a beggar to find shelter and protection from strangers, while her father ends his days in a prison, and her whole clan is ruined,—or, that she should control her feelings, and live respected and admired as the wife even of Duart?"

"By whom respected and admired?" demanded Neil. "Not by herself certainly; and when self-respect is wanting, how shall its loss be compensated? No, no, Ardmore; Marcella will not live either respected or admired, as the wife of Duart. I do not, indeed, believe that she will live to become his wife at all, for her mind is not formed of flexible stuff; and though she may put violence on her own wishes, and consent to contract an engagement now, the feeling that she has done so will eat into her very vitals. Go forward with your scheme, by all means, but remember that you were warned of its consequences. From the hour that she plights her troth to Duart, your daughter's days are numbered."

“ I hope not, Neil,” replied Fergus. “ God knows how reluctantly I have consented to this, and God knows also that I look forward not without hope, to the interval for which she stipulates, as likely, in some way or another, to operate in our favour. A thousand accidents may occur to prevent his claiming the fulfilment of her engagement. Duart is not immortal any more than Marcellly ; and if he were, young women have broken their troth before now.”

“ Never trust to such chances as these,” replied the Parson, “ for be assured that Marcellly, if she once utter the promise, will keep it, let come what may. And as to Duart’s death—pshaw ! that is the reasoning either of a fool or a desperate man.”

“ Be it so,” replied Fergus rising, “ for a more desperate man breathes not the air of heaven. It is too late, Neil—too late for every thing, except to increase, as this conversation has done, the unspeakable wretchedness of your friend. Am I blind to the truth of what you say ? Have I not looked at the question in all its bearings ? nay, have I not, from week to week, and from day to day, put off the necessity

which now lays me prostrate? I know that before God I am not justified in this matter; and my own heart tells me that I shall never know one moment's peace again. But what can I do? Say no more, as you desire to enjoy that quiet with which I have parted for ever. It must be, and the results must be left to Providence."

"Miserable man!" exclaimed Neil—"and not more miserable than guilty! But the punishment, not less than the crime, be upon your own head! Yet stay one moment. Is it true that you engage to procure for her the respite of a year?"

"I have made that promise certainly," replied Fergus.

"And you will adhere to it—of course you will?"

"I intend to do so, and I anticipate no opposition on Duart's part."

"There, perhaps, you are mistaken; but however this may be, you swear before Heaven, that unless he consent to this arrangement, his suit goes no farther?"

"Most willingly," replied Fergus.

“ Then there is yet a ground of hope,—feeble it is true, but still something. And Duart undertakes to accomplish at once his part of the convention ?”

“ As far as the discharge of outstanding arrears may be considered as its accomplishment. Beyond that I cannot urge him till Marcellly becomes his wife ; though I doubt not that matters will be put in a train without delay.”

“ Then I venture to predict that if this accursed match do take place, of which I entertain no expectation, Marcellly will have been doomed to a life of wretchedness in exchange for a temporary release to her father from embarrassments. But the future is in the hand of God. It is something to have secured twelve months of preparation for the accomplishment of such a sacrifice.”

It was now broad daylight, and Fergus, anxious to escape from a situation of extreme embarrassment, broadly hinted that to prolong the interview would be to endanger the Parson’s safety. The latter saw into the real motives which guided his friend, but made no effort to detain him. He felt, indeed, that reasoning was en-

tirely wasted upon a man, obstinate at all times, and now carried away entirely by false views both of interest and duty. They therefore separated: Fergus retiring to his chamber, which he reached ere his guest began to stir, and the Parson delaying where he was, till an opportunity should offer of quitting the cave without attracting observation.

CHAPTER VI.

FERGUS and his guest met at the breakfast-table, but it was under the influence of a restraint, not less distressing than unusual with both of them. It seemed as if they equally shrank from a discussion of the subject which occupied all their thoughts; for the conversation was constrained, uneasy, short, desultory, and unmeaning, like that of all men who speak merely because they believe that they are expected to do so. Not an allusion was made to the conference of yesterday, during the entire progress of the repast; and the absence of Marcella from her accustomed seat was not so much as noticed by either party.

Thus passed the meal, and the breakfast

service being removed, the two gentlemen continued to face one another like pugilists who desire to make a trial of their skill, yet hold each other in too much respect wantonly to provoke the contest. The forwardness and self-importance of Duart seemed, indeed, to have deserted him; while Fergus laboured under a degree of anxiety, far too distressing to permit him to be completely master of himself. At length, however, after a variety of common-place remarks had fallen from both, Duart ventured to hint that his business at home was pressing. He had no wish whatever to take undue advantage of the conversation which passed between them the evening before,—only it was necessary that he should be at Duart that night, and the distance was considerable. In a word, if Ardmore continued in the same mind, and the young lady were not worse, he would willingly see her with as little delay as possible; though he entreated that even in this, not the shadow of restraint should be imposed upon her inclinations, the absolute freedom of which, he was bound, above all men living, to advocate.

“ My sentiments remain unaltered,” replied Fergus, “ and my daughter is, as I told you yesterday, perfectly prepared to hear and consider any proposals which you may be pleased to make. I must, however, warn you, that she has strange fancies as to the degree of attention due to persons in her situation. She was brought up in private, and under very peculiar circumstances ; and if she have imbibed more of the spirit of romance than belongs to the age in which we live, you, Duart, will not, I believe, fail to make allowances for her.”

“ The young lady may rely upon being treated with all imaginable respect by me,” replied Duart. “ I entertain for her a regard too pure, and, permit me to add, too disinterested, not to indulge her in every reasonable humour, and I am sure that none of her humours can be other than reasonable.”

“ You speak like a man of sense and of honour,” replied Fergus, his countenance brightening, and his manner becoming less and less embarrassed ; “ you only confirm the opinions which I had previously formed respecting you. I do not know how far you may be disposed to

treat a mere whim as a reasonable humour—but she has a whim of her own, and you must yield to it."

"What is it?" demanded Duart.

"She has ever stipulated that the individual whom she may select as a future husband, shall, after receiving an assurance of his acceptance from her own lips, withdraw himself entirely from her society; and leave her and himself to try the strength of their respective fidelity by a year and a day of non intercourse. This is not very usual with girls so circumstanced; but Marcella is not an ordinary girl, and to be won, must be sought in her own way."

Duart was silent for some moments, during the passage of which, he kept his keen grey eye riveted with a scrutinizing stare upon Fergus's countenance. It seemed as if he strove to read what was passing in a mind, which, not unaccustomed to work in secret, threw little of its meaning into the features; and the curl of his lip as he prepared to answer, implied that the truth had not been wholly concealed from him.

"Is this all?" said he. "A strange humour

I admit it to be ; but the woman who encourages that, has, doubtless, other fancies in reserve. Is there no other compact—nothing else in the shape of profit and loss—or, as we used to say in the humanity class of Glasgow college, no *quid pro quo*? Surely this is not all.”

“ Not exactly,” replied Fergus, in a firmer tone ; “ my daughter has other points to discuss, but these, I apprehend, she will broach for herself.”

“ Come now, Ardmore,” replied Duart, lapsing into something like the petulant tone which marked his conversation on his first arrival, “ let us have the whole truth out at once. There are none by to note down our words, and what is said to-day, may be denied on oath to-morrow. Your daughter has no particular fancy for this—what shall we call it?—respectable—ay, that is the term to apply to a man of fifty-five—this respectable carcase of mine. She fancies something younger, perhaps, or more elegant—more vigorous I will defy her to get ; but she has her fancies, as all girls have, and the match, if made at all, will be yours, not hers. In order to draw her into

it at all, we must therefore make all possible concessions. Go on then, and let us have a list of them at once ; for I love, when striking a bargain, to know what I am about from the beginning.”

“ I do not understand you,” replied Fergus coolly.

“ Not understand me !” answered Duart ; “ why, the whole thing is as plain as the snow on Bennevis. But let there be no mystery between us. In plain terms, then, I want to know, before I say ay or no to this article, by how many it is to be followed, and what their nature may be.”

“ And I, in my turn, can only assure you that I am almost as much in the dark as you are yourself. I take my ground, however, on this preliminary question, and unless it be answered in the affirmative, I must, however reluctantly, put a stop at once to the negociation.”

“ Very well,” replied Duart, with an affected carelessness, which an awkward fumbling with the hilt of his rapier and a flush on his brow belied ; “ suppose I assent to this strange stipulation, what do I gain by it ?”

“ The liberty to address my daughter in person, and the assurance from me, that if you comply with such other demands as she may find it convenient to make, your suit will be at least favourably entertained. As to the issue of your meeting, of that I can say nothing.”

“ In other words, Ardmore, this is a sort of barter between you and me, by which I, on my part, undertake to help you through your difficulties, and you promise, at the end of a year and a day, to give to my arms your very reluctant daughter. By heavens !” continued he, striding across the room, “ I know not why I should submit to this. Do you recollect how you are circumstanced ? Have you forgotten that you and your entire race are in my power, and that I might ruin you, if I chose, to-morrow ?”

“ I have not,” replied Fergus calmly ; “ I remember perfectly, that our only hope rests upon your clemency. Were it not so, possibly you and I might speak to one another to-day in a different tone, and on a different subject.”

“ Pshaw ! man,” answered Duart, “ I did not mean to hurt your feelings. You are unfortunate, and God forbid that I, whose star is

in the ascendant, should outrage the feelings of my less favoured countrymen. I had no other intention in saying what I did, than to remind you, that to drive too hard a bargain may prove fatal to us both :—to me, in frustrating what I acknowledge to be the first wish of my heart ; to you—but no matter about that. Well, then, I suppose I must consent to this foolish freak. A year and a day make up a long period, but they will equally come to an end. Say that I consent to this, what is next to be required ?”

“ Seriously, and upon my honour, I do not know. Something, I am aware, will be said about cancelling obligations that exist, and giving proof that, ere the wedding-day come round, Mac Diarmid will be restored to his rights and property. But how this may be urged, or in what order, I am as ignorant as you are yourself.”

Duart’s brow lowered. “ Demanding proofs, did you say ?” asked he ; “ What kind of proofs ? Is not my promise sufficient,—must I have vouchers for my own credibility ? I must have mistaken your meaning, Ardmore.

Neither you nor your daughter could insult a man in my situation by demanding from him, in any case, other proofs than his own affirmation."

"As far as I am concerned," replied Fergus, "you are perfectly right. I entertain no suspicion of your power to accomplish that which you are avowedly desirous to accomplish. Even the cancelling of our most pressing bonds I could leave entirely to your discretion. But my daughter has imbibed sentiments in many respects different from mine, and if you really desire to possess her, these must be humoured."

"As far as may be consistent with my own honour," replied Duart, "I will deny her nothing. But to seek other evidence than the word of a gentleman,—that were, indeed, to put a slight upon him, such as he ought not to bear. If she insist upon this, then the law must take its course, and I am not to blame."

"Be it so, Duart," replied Fergus, shrugging his shoulders; "I have done all that I could to meet your wishes. I will never lay violence on my daughter; nor would you desire me to do so; and if you cannot arrange the details of

this affair yourself, the treaty must come to an end, and I take the fate which Providence shall award me."

"Why no," replied Duart, speaking slowly, and with apparent hesitation, "I do not see the thing exactly in the light that you do. A middle course may be wrought out. You say that you are satisfied with the security of my word alone, but that your daughter may demand more. What then? I can promise to furnish you with such proofs as shall remove all doubt from your mind; and you can assure her that I have done so. Thus will my personal honour be saved, while her scruples, childish and groundless at the best, are effectually removed."

"But suppose she puts the question to me, of what nature these proofs are?"

"She will never do that. She knows that you never have deceived her, and that in this matter, above all others, you would avoid deceit."

"Look you, Duart," replied Fergus sharply, "if I am required to satisfy my daughter that other proof than your own assurance has been

furnished, that proof, be it what it may, must be forthcoming. I make no stipulation as to time. There are twelve long months before us, during which, on this understanding, the engagement which Marcellly contracts shall be conditional : in other words, she shall fulfill it, provided you show us, any time between this and your wedding-day, that you do possess interest enough to accomplish all for which we stipulate. If you fail in this, I take God to witness, that I will never hold my daughter peremptorily to her engagement."

" I might object to all this, Ardmore," said Duart, " and I probably should object to it, were I not attached, as I am, to your daughter. Be it, however, as you propose. You will satisfy Marcellly, if you can, by professing your own confidence in my assurances ; and, unless she explicitly demand other proofs, you will lead her to believe : or—or—or—you will, at least, say nothing about the nature of the evidence on which you rely. I, on my part, renew all the assurances I have ever given you. I pledge my word, that I do possess the means of obtaining for your chief, not only a removal

of the outlawry, but a restitution to his property. I undertake to exercise these means; and though the matter must be managed with delicacy, and delay will doubtless arise, of its ultimate arrangement you need entertain no doubt. And now for the young lady, from whose lips I am anxious to receive the sentence which is to render me either the happiest or the most miserable of men."

There was a strange misgiving in the mind of Fergus, such as he had not, at any previous stage of this business, experienced. Yet he knew not how to give utterance to his suspicions. He disliked the tone in which his guest spoke ; he disliked still more the project — jesuitical, if not positively dishonest — by which he was to be made a party in deceiving his daughter : and the repeated remonstrances of Parson Neil recurred to him in no very agreeable manner. Nevertheless, he felt as if the power of deliberating farther were taken away. With some difficulty he stammered out a few words, intended to impress upon Duart's mind the necessity of dealing gently with Marcella, and then withdrew, in order to prepare

her for the interview. We will not pause to repeat what passed in the young lady's boudoir on that occasion. Enough is done when we state, that Fergus found her calm and collected, and that, having ushered in the suitor, he closed the door, and left them to conduct the conference according to their peculiar tastes.

Marcella bent her head without rising as her lover entered, and, pointing to a chair considerably removed from that which she occupied, requested that he would be seated. Naturally shy in female society, and more than ordinarily embarrassed by the peculiar circumstances which surrounded him, Duart did as he was desired, and, for a minute or two, kept his eyes riveted on the ground, while he played, like a raw youth to whom the toy has for the first time been entrusted, with the handle of his sword. By degrees, however, his self-command seemed to return. He looked up, and saw the dark and piercing eye of Marcella fixed upon him with an expression which it was impossible to misunderstand. Pride now came to the aid of other feelings, if, in-

deed, it did not wholly supplant them. His lip quivered, and, if his voice faltered slightly at first, it too soon regained its accustomed harsh and resolute tone.

“ I presume, madam,” said he, “ that you are already informed of the business which has led me to intrude thus upon your privacy. Your father has doubtless told you, that I desire nothing on earth so much as your happiness, and that I am anxious to prove the sincerity of this declaration by placing myself and my fortunes at your feet. I am not a boy, to dream of catching your fancy by amorous declarations or set speeches ; but what I say, I say in sincerity,—that, if you will be mine, it will be the business of my life to hinder you from repenting the confidence which you repose in me.”

“ You judge rightly, sir,” replied Marcellly ; “ I was led to expect this declaration ; and, following the commendable example which you have set me, I, too, will tell you in few words how I am prepared to receive it. It would be the foulest hypocrisy were I to profess for you individually the smallest preference ; nay more,

—were I to hide from you, that, under any other circumstances than those by which I am beset, I could not have entertained your proposal for a moment. But as matters stand, I accept you as my future husband at once. Nay, sir,” continued she, waving her hand, in order to check a movement which he made to approach her; “ hear me out, ere you deviate, even slightly, from that just and becoming sobriety which has hitherto characterized your manner. I am ready to regard you as my future husband, but it is only upon terms, from the very least of which no power under Heaven shall ever induce me to deviate. Are you willing to accept me, subject to such conditions as I may choose to specify?”

“ ‘Tis a strange manner of proceeding, fair maiden,” replied Duart, with a forced smile; “ but thy swain has, of course, no right of choice. Say on then, and be the terms what they may, I am, of course, bound by all the laws of gallantry and romance to abide by them.”

“ We have met,” replied Marcellly deliberately, “ not to exchange compliments, nor yet

to waste time in unmeaning raillery ; but to complete, as speedily as possible, a contract, by which this poor person is put up to barter. Listen, then, while I state, one by one, and in language as explicit as can be used, the terms on which I consent to be your wife. In the first place I require, as a preliminary to all others, that, at the conclusion of this interview, you quit Ardmore, and do not again obtrude yourself upon my presence for the space of a year and a day. Are you content to subscribe to this ?”

“ I told your father that I was ready to forego my claim upon your hand for the long period which you have just specified ; but to deny myself all that while the delight of your society,—surely, Miss Marcella, you would not require that ?”

“ I never say what I do not mean,” replied Marcella coldly ; “ unless you consent to this primary article, our treaty ends at once.”

Duart turned himself on his chair, and the blood rushed to his forehead : nevertheless, he controlled his temper, and answered calmly :—

“ The prize is so invaluable, that harsh as

the condition is, I consent to it. And now, madam, what next?"

"The power which you possess of molesting my father, and my kinsmen in consequence, for rents due to the existing Government, shall not be exercised; and you engage to satisfy those who are more conversant in such matters than I, that this matter is fully arranged."

"Most freely, most cheerfully," replied Duart: "there needs but such an intercessor to secure for the Mac Diarmids a great deal more than a discharge from past obligations. Go on, dear lady, for to this article I subscribe, Heaven knows, with far better will than to the former."

"They tell me," continued Marcellly, bowing coldly, in token that he was understood, "that your interest with the Government is such as to obtain for this unhappy district a perfect deliverance from the evils which afflict it. You must satisfy my father that these reports are well founded, and pledge yourself to exert that interest as he or I shall direct."

"I will do so, madam, not only without

reluctance," replied he, "but with a readiness such as even you shall commend. Public report speaks the truth, I do possess so much power; and you may rely upon my using it for any purpose which you may specify. To what else must I assent ere I venture to salute my betrothed bride? I listen impatiently."

"There is little to be added," said Marcella mournfully, "only that my first prohibition must include that you approach not one inch nearer to me than you are at this moment. Something, indeed, I would say as to the speedy settlement of this country; for I would fain live to see Mac Diarmid once more restored to his people; but the details of these matters I leave to be adjusted by others: for myself, I put my trust in Heaven. And now, sir," continued she, her resolution scarcely supporting her, "this interview may end. Fulfil your part of the treaty, and I will fulfil mine—that is, provided you and I both live to witness the termination of the period. Are you content?"

"Perfectly, most beautiful of women," replied Duart, making a second effort to ap-

proach her, which, however, she made haste to arrest.

“ Stand back, sir !” cried she, shrinking from him, and holding out her hands as if to repel his advance. “ Approach but a single step, and I withdraw the promise which I have just given. A year hence I may cease to possess that power ; but as yet I am my own mistress,—and I charge you, on your peril, to leave me.”

“ As thou wilt, fair maiden,” replied Duart, with an affected indifference, which sufficed not to hide the chagrin under which he laboured ; “ as yet thy word is law ; but the time may come, ay, and shortly too, when the memory of this foolish scene shall cause thee more of regret than of triumph. Meanwhile, farewell, my bonny bride, and when I come again to claim thee, see that the cloud sits less heavily on that brow.”

He quitted the room as he spoke, and rushed rather than strode through the hall. His horses having been early ordered, were already at the door, and his people in attendance ; he did not, therefore, pause to bid his host farewell, but was in the act of mounting, when

Fergus, who in some degree anticipated such a termination to the interview, hurried after him.

“ How stand our matters ? ” demanded he in a tone of forced gaiety, without noticing the rudeness of his guest.

“ Well — well as the heart of man could desire,” replied Duart in a similar tone ; “ she is the most yielding, the most doating of lovers. Go to, Ardmore ! you have tutored her nobly, and she knows her lesson to admiration. ’Tis a strange wooing, I admit, but then we are strange beings altogether. So God be wi’ ye ! my father that is to be. Within these two days the releases shall arrive ; and for the other articles, why we must complete them as we can.”

So saying, he waved his hand to Fergus, struck his spurs into his horse’s flanks, and, followed by his attendants, was soon beyond the avenue, and far on the road to Duart.

CHAPTER VII.

THE scene of our drama is changed, and the reader is introduced, towards the close of an unusually dull day, into the interior of the shieling at the extremity of the Moss Hag behind Glenarroch. There, upon a sort of rude scaffold, erected for the purpose in a corner of the hovel, covered over by a coarse sheet, and surmounted, as usual, with a plate of salt, lay the dead body of old Elspeth ; which two crones, after having stretched and otherwise prepared it for its last tenement, were guarding against the influence of evil spirits. The better to assist them in the accomplishment of this task, they had placed at the head and feet of the corpse

four small resin tapers, which, though sufficient to scare away the foul fiend who exercises himself only in utter darkness, failed in sending through the cloud of peat smoke which filled the chamber more than a glimmering of light. Meanwhile the beldames themselves were not unmindful that sorrow is dry, and that to support the labour of a death-watch, the animal wants must be supplied. They sate apart from their charge on a couple of low stools, which they had drawn as close as possible to the fire. A one-footed table stood near them, on which were arranged a stoup of whisky, with a broken glass, a plate indifferently heaped up with oaten cakes and ewe-milk cheese, and a wooden trencher filled with lumps of smoking and savoury red-deer venison. From this they had cut or torn, each of them, a portion, which they devoured as dogs do their prey ; and occasionally the liquor was passed from hand to hand, as caprice, or a craving for excitement, dictated. To complete the picture, it is necessary to add, that a couple of tobacco-pipes, short, black, and dingy, lay ready charged among the ashes, while a mull, or snuff-box, accessible to

both parties, occupied, as it were, a central position between them.

The crones ate long and heartily, and in profound silence, which was broken only by the smacking of their withered lips, as they mumbled with toothless jaws bones which they were unable to pick, or gave renewed vigour to their fainting appetites by a draught of alcohol. Even the watchers of the dead cannot, however, protract their enjoyments beyond the limits which nature has assigned. The venison became gradually less and less savoury, the cheese was tasted, but cast aside with scorn, and, finally, the pipes were assumed and the stools drawn apart so as that each might occupy her own station, with the body of the smouldering turf between them. A few long puffs followed, in order that the tobacco might become fully ignited, and the conversation so long deferred began.

“ It’s but a poor doe, after all, Janet,” said the one ; “ on sic an occasion as this Ranald might hae provided a buck, at ony rate.”

“ And it’s as tough as bow-strings or bend leather,” replied her companion ; “ my very jaws are sore wi’ chewing at it. But what

could we expect frae Ranald of the bloody hand : he's the worst of the flock, an' it's nae scandal to say there was na ae spark o' kindness for man or beast in ony o' them."

" She was a proud limmer, her that lies there,—proud o' the station she ance filled, and owre muckle gi'en to buik lair. And we a' ken what cam o't. Her goodman died at Sheriffe Muir ; Donald's head was lang on the west port o' E'nbrough ; Hemish was hangit by Glenarroch himself ; and now Ranald,—there's nae ill gaiety gawn that he hasna a hand in it."

" Aweel, you say true, cummer," replied Janet, " though for a' that I'm thinking the Lady Glenarroch didna just behave weel to her. The gentles should na forget that they owe their first nourishment to the like o' us. It's nae credit to the lady that Elspeth should hae suffered for her son's demerits, even if he did deserve hanging."

" Suffered, lass !" rejoined her companion ; " what ca' ye suffering ? Hadna she house and hald to live in, and goud when ony was to be got, forby claes that would hae buskit a queen, and mony other good things beside ?

And where cam a' thae frae, think ye, if Lady Glenarroch didna gie them?"

"But they say, Janet, that she was owre gret with the fiend himsel. I'm sure there was ne'er a storm raised nor a boat sunk that folk didna gie her the credit o't; and as to the whipping away o' Miss Marcella yon time, if a' be true, she kent mair about it than she might hae liket to tell."

"Aweel, cummer, and what about that? I'm thinking the lassie wad be far better disposed of as the auld jaud wanted than she's likely to be at the pleasure of her father. It's a waefu' thing to think that our ain bonny doo should be gien up to the tender mercies of a Corby. Ochon for the days when we were young, Ailsie; the claymore had some authority then, but noo it's law, and nought but law, that rules a'."

"And if it be, Janet, we're likely to hear some news o't ere lang, for that last jouk of Ranald's will mak an awful souch through the country. What could possess the creatur to do sic a deed in broad day, and then march aff carrying back his spulzie to Ardmore?

Duart will be doon upon us without doubt,
and then, the Lord hae mercy on us a'the-gither!"

"Na, I kenna mair nor you, what to mak o' it. If he had taen the chield's life I wouldna hae wondered, for dead men, ye ken, tell no tales. But to plunder a messenger frae Macullamore, and him, too, on his road to Duart; and then to lat the body get awa to tell how a Mac Diarmid sarved him; it was doonright madness. Ranald's a greater fool than I took him for."

"And what was't he got by it? Nae great feck o' siller, they tell me, but a' wheen letters, worth little to ony body, and naething at a' to him. The'l hang him, as sure as his brother Hemish was hanged, if they get a haud o' him, and he winna e'en hae the satisfaction to think that he did ony thing to deserve it."

"But what cam o' the letters, hinney?" asked Janet.

"They didna lang bide wi' him that took them, of that ye may be sure; but what use she is to mak of them, I canna pretend to say."

“ Wha, cummer ? what na she ?—for I ken naething as yet forby the robbing of the post.”

“ Wha should it be but her that harbours him, the Leddy Glenarroch, to be sure ? Didna Effie see him gie the mail bag into her hand just anent the fore-door yonder no half an hour before the witch carline gae her last groan ? And a bonny fluster they were baith in, for Effie watched them narrowly, though they said but little, and soon parted.”

“ And what cam’ of him then ?”

“ He just gaed to the bedside and telt his mother that he done her biddin ; and though the carline’s een were glazed afore, she looked at him as if she understood what he said, and her lips moved, but she could na utter a word. It was a fearfu’ look she coost, and then she gae a lang breath, and a’ was owre.”

“ And where’s Ranald now, cummer ?”

“ Oo, that’s mair nor I can tell ; nae doubt in some of his ain hiding-holes. But whare’er he be, it canna be denied that he took good care of his mother’s streeching. He telt Effie that she might lay out the corpse if she liket, and he would provide meat and drink for the

watchers; but Effie was fleyed, and so she asked me to do it, and I asked you, and there's an end of all that I ken about the matter."

We will leave these ancient sibyls to pursue their desultory chat, while we put the reader in possession of the facts of that case to which they alluded thus mysteriously.

It will be borne in mind that the last words uttered by Mrs. Mac Diarmid as Fergus and her niece quitted Glenarroch on the morning of that day which brought Duart to Ardmore, implied that the speaker was, or believed herself to be, acquainted with certain plans arranged by her brother-in-law, and that she had resolved, at all hazards, to thwart them. The truth was, that for some months previously a rumour had spread abroad,—in what source originating no one appeared to know,—that Ardmore meditated giving his daughter in marriage to Mac Alpine of Duart. That proposals to this effect had been made by Duart the reader needs not that we should now inform him. From what passed between the two gentlemen during the brief sojourn of Duart at Ardmore ; this much will have been already surmised : and

the experience of every day demonstrates that when men have once unbosomed themselves ever so confidentially on any subject of importance, the channels through which the public become aware of their designs are as numerous as they are recondite. Whether Duart might have spoken of the event as probable, or Ardmore alluded to it as of possible attainment, would equally serve the purpose of the hundred-tongued goddess. It was soon a matter for discussion in every hovel and shieling throughout the district, and the arrangement was either applauded or condemned according as considerations of public policy or private friendship for the young lady carried greater weight with the individuals engaged in it.

Harbouring one paramount idea, and we had almost said one idea only—a sense of the insult offered to her son, and a burning desire to avenge it—Mrs. Mac Diarmid no sooner became aware of the report in question than she gave to it unqualified belief. She looked at the matter as one of prudential consideration alone, and totally put out of view all regard to the tastes or feelings of the young lady. It was

a part of her creed,—a creed of no uncommon acceptance in the Highlands seventy years ago,—that young women have no right, in such cases, to form any judgment of their own ; but that they are bound to give their hands to any persons, young or old, accomplished or rude, with whom it may suit the views or interests of their parents to unite them. It was owing to this persuasion, indeed, that she resented so bitterly the rejection of Allan's suit, not by Marcellly, though that proved distasteful enough, but by Fergus ; for the refusal to unite the families implied an assumption of superiority on his part, which the relation they mutually bore one towards the other, did not warrant. So long, however, as Marcellly continued single, and there appeared no disposition to give her away, the indignation of this infatuated woman could be restrained within bounds. But like other persons, whose wrongs are purely imaginary, she lay on the watch, as it were, for grounds of farther offence ; and the first rumour of a new alliance called more violently

than ever into play the jealousy and rancour which had for a while slumbered inactive.

Mrs. Mac Diarmid looked at the project as one founded in that cautious regard for self, which she, mistaking in many respects the character of her kinsman, believed to be the actuating principle of his life. Duart was rich ; his family was respectable, and of long standing in the country. He was in the confidence of the hereditary enemy of the clan Diarmid, and a trusted agent of the existing Government. He possessed, moreover, unlimited authority over the district which Fergus had so long and so ably controlled. What could be so natural as that a wily politician like Ardmore should desire to enter into close alliance with a man capable of restoring to him more than he had lost by the issue of the late rebellion. The thing was as clear as the sun at noon day. It never entered into the lady's thoughts to inquire, how far her kinsman would or would not place any value on his daughter's happiness. As we have said already, her opinions on this head would have

done no discredit to the Patriarchal ages ; and she came at once to the conclusion, that the alliance was of Fergus's seeking ; and that Marcella, partly in obedience to her father's wishes, partly through the lust of power and wealth, and station, had entered into the project with perfect readiness.

Having arrived at this conclusion, nothing could be more consonant with the character of the individual, and perhaps of the age in which she lived, than that she should direct all the powers of her ingenuity to thwart a project, on which the man whom she hated with unmitigated rancour was believed to have set his heart. A thousand schemes were considered and rejected, not because they were either iniquitous, or beset with danger, but because they held out scarcely a hope of ultimate success. Now she thought of making a second attempt on the person of Marcella ; but against that, the unceasing vigilance of Fergus offered sufficient protection. Now the idea of directing against Duart himself the blow, which a lingering of better feeling withheld her from aiming elsewhere, occurred to

her. But this, like a variety of other plans, appeared, when submitted to closer examination, too wild for accomplishment ; and she became, in the end, reduced to the condition of one who earnestly desires that which he knows not by what possible means to attain. Such was the state of her wishes and prospects when an account of Duart's visit to Ardmore was communicated to her, accompanied by an assurance that the affair so long under discussion was at length finally arranged. It was even asserted, that the wedding-day was fixed, and that so soon as the customary arrangements should be completed, the union of Marcellly with Mac Alpine would take place. This was rendered the more credible, because within the short space of three days, certain of the tacksmen had received official notice, that the proceedings with which they had been threatened were suspended ; while there passed between Duart and Inverary frequent couriers, as if some business of pressing import were in progress. Mrs. Mac Diarmid had struggled against the misery of hesitation and suspense long enough ; she found it impossible to do so

any longer, and she proceeded, as in such cases her wont was, to solicit the advice and secure the co-operation of old Elspeth.

Never, from the hour when their long-broken intercourse was resumed, had Elspeth exhibited towards her foster daughter the waywardness and distrust which, under the disguise of a wandering intellect, she had displayed at the first interview. As if the feelings of the nurse were called back again into full play, and those of the injured mother entirely laid aside, she not only received her on each fresh visit with the respectful kindness of a devoted menial, but stood ready to risk all, not even excepting the life of Ranald, the last survivor of her sons, in her service. But Elspeth proved more than a ready assistant in the execution of such devices as Mrs. Mac Diarmid might propose. Intimately acquainted with the humours of the people, by whom she was held in a sort of superstitious reverence, possessed of much natural shrewdness and a reckless courage, Elspeth was well qualified to advise as well as to execute, and repeatedly hindered her foster daughter from rushing headlong upon enterprises which

might have ended only in her own exposure and shame. She had consented, it is true, to that desperate attempt which an accident alone had defeated ; and the arrangement of the details which proceeded entirely from her, gave proof of equal hardihood and skill. Nevertheless, the turn which affairs subsequently took, had convinced her of the folly, as well as impolicy of any fresh efforts to bring about that which Heaven itself appeared to have prohibited. Her business latterly had therefore been to soothe and keep in subjection the angry feelings of her associate ; and in spite of the difficulties which attended the management of a matter so delicate, she had not been wholly unsuccessful.

It will readily be believed that of the reports which reached her, touching Fergus's designs with respect to Duart, Mrs. Mac Diarmid gave a full account to her nurse. Still she found the old woman averse to sanction any proceedings which might involve those concerned in trouble. Her constant argument amounted to this, that as yet there was no certainty to rest upon,—that people loved to talk even where

they themselves knew that they talked at random,—and that it would be time enough to devise some remedial measure so soon as the necessity of acting should become apparent. Mrs. Mac Diarmid bore with this till Duart's unlooked-for visit, and the circumstances which arose out of, or immediately followed it, furnished her with fresh ground of alarm. She then renewed her entreaties to Elspeth for counsel, and, to her unspeakable satisfaction, found that there no longer existed that backwardness to meet her wishes of which she had hitherto, though without reason, complained.

It was on the third day after the occurrence of the events described in the former chapter that Mrs. Mac Diarmid sought, by appointment, the cottage at the extremity of the Moss Hag. Elspeth was prepared for the visit, for she had received one the evening before, and had requested that she might be allowed to consider by herself of the steps which it would be most expedient to take. She was now prompt with a device from which it was impossible to doubt that a rupture between Ardmore and Duart must occur. It amounted

to this, that one of the couriers, of whose passage to and fro Mrs. Mac Diarmid had spoken, should be waylaid and robbed as near as possible to the grounds of Ardmore, and that her son Ranald, whom she freely offered for the service, should be seen to escape with his plunder, as it were, towards the house. Such an insult Duart could not possibly overlook. Atonement might be made in due time,—possibly after a few more injuries had been heaped on the whole clan; but in the mean while the projected alliance must be put a stop to, and Fergus's ambitious projects defeated. Mrs. Mac Diarmid would have started objections to a plan which she could not but consider as at once of dubious accomplishment, and more than dubious issue; but Elspeth would listen to no remonstrance. She would not have the weight of blood upon her head now, for the hand of God was ready to strike. She knew that her hours were numbered; and though the thought of having aided her dear lady in her need would smooth the pillow of death, she owed it to her own soul that her last moments should be left undisturbed by the

recollection of murder committed at her suggestion. Mrs. Mac Diarmid saw that it would be vain to argue the point ; so leaving the whole matter to be arranged between Ranald and his mother, she returned less than satisfied to her home.

Of the events which followed a few words will suffice to give a sufficiently elaborate detail. It was known throughout the country at an early hour on the following morning, that towards dusk on the day before a messenger travelling express from Inverary to Duart had been waylaid ; that offering no resistance his life had been spared, though his money and despatches were taken from him ; that the deed was perpetrated in a wild and desolate spot not far from the foot of the rock on which Ardmore stood ; and that the robber, narrowly watched by his victim, was seen, after making various detours, to turn sharp into a young plantation which skirted the rock in question. As was naturally to be expected, men could talk of nothing else than an exploit as rash as it was badly managed, and pregnant with fatal consequences. Few ventured to hazard a direct

opinion respecting the real author of the deed, though it was easy to perceive from their manner that they entertained a suspicion on that head ; but all, without disguise, lamented the calamities of which they foresaw that the transaction would prove the prelude. Mrs. Mac Diarmid alone received the intelligence without dismay. Surprise it was necessary to affect, and she did affect it,—but she seized the earliest opportunity of escaping to Elspeth's cottage, where she knew that perfect information on the subject awaited her.

There were great and awful changes at the Moss Hag shieling since Mrs. Mac Diarmid had passed its threshold before. Elspeth's prophecy concerning her own approaching end seemed on the eve of its accomplishment ; for though she sat in her chair as usual, her lips were white and livid, and her breath came thick and laboured, like that of a person in her last agony. Mrs. Mac Diarmid was dreadfully shocked. Forgetting her own cares and the business which brought her there, she gave herself up entirely to the dictates of nature, and removing the old woman to the bed, hur-

ried off to procure an attendant, with whom she immediately returned. Yet all the attention which kindness could suggest was bestowed upon Elspeth to no purpose. She spoke not, except a few inarticulate words, in which the names of her foster-daughter, her son, and Parson Neil were strangely mingled, and appeared totally unconscious of the attempts which were made to call back her wandering senses or relieve her sufferings. In this manner she lingered several hours, during which Ranald came not. But he came at last, and the circumstance of which the crones spoke as marking the interview between him and Mrs. Mac Diarmid, occurred under the watchful and curious eye of Effie. Finally, Ranald saw his mother—delivered his strange message, which appeared to rouse her even in her last moments, and continued to gaze upon her countenance without shedding a tear, till it became fixed in death. A deep groan then burst from him, and he clasped his hands wildly together.

“Thou art gone, my mother!” cried he, “and the last link that bound me to the accursed race is broken. Henceforth revenge be-

mine ! I have obeyed thee whilst thou lived, ay, even when to do so wrung my very heart-strings ; and I have received as my reward the treatment of a dog. Yes, even now, by doing this service at thy request I must flee for life to the hills. But my hour will come by and by, and when it does, how sweet will be the draught to these parched lips ! "Woman," continued he, turning fiercely towards Effie, " see that thou do what is right to my mother's corpse. I cannot stay to aid thee, but go to the Black Rock two hours hence, and there, behind the juniper tree, close by the spring, thou wilt find food and drink to support thee in thy task. But mark me, woman ! though thou see me not, I will observe thee, and woe betide thee if thou omit aught that is due to the most honoured clay after death ! "

Ranald did not wait for a reply, but rushed, with a wild and disordered step, from the cottage. Of what followed an account has been already given. Effie Macoll's courage failing, the two most obdurate and callous hags in the district undertook to wake the corpse, and kept their promise after the fashion described in the beginning of this chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN describing these occurrences we have been led somewhat to anticipate the order of time, which would have kept us for a while at Ardmore, where the condition of the family, after Duart's departure, was the reverse of enviable. Ill at ease as to the propriety of the course which he had adopted, and shrinking, like a guilty thing, from its discussion, Fergus kept aloof throughout the remainder of that and the whole of the day following, even from his daughter. Marcella, too, appeared nowise disposed to seek the society of her father. She confined herself entirely to her own apartments,

and held intercourse with no one except Christian, from whom she strove, though with very imperfect success, to conceal the extreme depression under which she laboured.

Thus passed two whole days, little to the satisfaction of any one; nor did the occurrences of the third vary, at least agreeably, from those which distinguished its predecessors. Fergus met his daughter, it is true, at the breakfast-table, and was shocked at observing the alteration which four-and-twenty hours of wasting sorrow had created in her appearance. The bloom had entirely faded from her cheek: she was pale, languid, listless,—spoke little, ate nothing, and scarcely raised her eyes from the level of the table; nor could all his efforts draw from her more than a faint smile or a brief answer to such questions as he propounded. Yet no allusion whatever was made to her interview with Duart, either by Fergus or herself. The former, indeed, feared to enter upon a subject, from the bare consideration of which the latter shrank too sensitively to bring it forward. In a word, the early part

of the morning passed over as it had never done before,—heavily, uneasily, and irksomely to both parties.

They had separated, as their custom was, Marcellly to superintend such matters as fell to her share, and Fergus to follow the ordinary routine of a country life, when a messenger from Duart was announced, and immediately admitted. He was the bearer of an equivocal discharge, which, while it released the defaulters from the apprehension of immediate ejection at the suit of Government, left them as much as ever at the mercy of the Government agent. It is true that there accompanied it a private letter, full of protestations and assurances, by which Fergus was assured that the present proceeding was to be regarded only as a temporary expedient, and that the arrangements for a more permanent settlement were in progress. But of the particular channel through which the affair was to be managed, as well as of the time when its accomplishment might be fairly calculated upon, not a hint was dropped. The letter displayed, in short, a great deal of goodwill, as well as a fair proportion of statesman-

like equivocation on the part of the writer ; but it left the questions, to the adjustment of which Fergus looked with the most intense anxiety, exactly where they had been ere Duart became his guest.

Fergus read both the letter and the deed with which it was accompanied, at least a dozen times over, and at the end of each perusal his heart more and more misgave him. He recalled to his recollection the strong language used by Parson Neil, while remonstrating against the meditated betrothal, as well as the doubts and scruples which infested his own mind, ever since the subject began seriously to occupy it. What if these should prove well-founded after all ? What if Duart were playing the purely selfish game ; and in order to obtain the accomplishment of his own wishes, had given pledges which he possessed not the power to redeem ? Yet, why should he do this ? In a pecuniary point of view, Marcellly was no great match for the wealthy laird of Duart ; and as to any thing else, Mac Alpine had arrived at a time of life when the influence of personal beauty is rarely such as to

overbear the dictates of prudence. It was absurd in the highest degree, to permit a confidence once bestowed, to be shaken by every petty occurrence which might fall out slightly at variance with anticipations probably unreasonable.—“Besides,” continued Fergus, speaking aloud, as if the very sound of his own voice would tend to stifle the suspicions by which he continued to be tormented, “is not the game still in our own hands? True, we have not, so far, greatly bettered our condition; but at least we are not worse than we were—and a year and a day may bring many things about, of which at present we can form no guess. At all events, Marcella has plighted her troth, strictly under conditions, and if these fail of receiving their accomplishment, she is free to act as she chooses.”

Having said this, so soon as he had dismissed the messenger, with a suitable reply to his future son-in-law, Fergus made ready to convey to the parties concerned, information of the reprieve; but ere he could carry the design into execution, it was announced to him that Parson Neil desired to hold with him a

few minutes' conversation. Now, though full of doubts and misgivings, for the removal of which he was anxious, even should that be done by a demonstration that his worst fears were well-founded, it so happened that, of all men living, Parson Neil was the very last with whom at that moment he could have wished to communicate. He dreaded, he knew not why, more than a repetition of the arguments to which he had formerly listened ; and his own better judgment whispered, that there needed scarcely any additional weight to render them irresistible. He would not, however, refuse to see a man with whom he had, for so many years, and under so many changes of fortune, lived on terms of confidence ; so he desired that the Parson might be shown in, and screwed his own courage to the sticking-place, in order to meet him on something like equal terms.

“ What news, Neil ?” demanded Fergus, with an air of feigned indifference : “ has aught occurred to bring thee hither so urgently ?”

“ Not much,” replied the Parson ; “ only having seen, as I was passing from Marcellý’s

boudoir, one of Duart's people quit the house, I felt desirous, on various accounts, to ascertain of what tidings he was the bearer."

"Is that all?" said Fergus: "one would have imagined, from the tone in which this interview was demanded, that there was matter of greater moment at issue than that. The tidings are such as we had a right to expect, and no more."

"Oh, indeed!" replied the Parson: "has he arranged matters so soon? Why then I must own, that I did him injustice, and owe both him and you an apology."

"I don't know what you call arranging matters," observed Fergus. "We were never led to suppose that the outlawry would be removed in a day—or other, and less important points, settled by a mere act of volition. But so far we may make ourselves easy: there is no danger of any ejectment being effected—at least for the present."

"For the present! Why only for the present, Ardmore? If there be danger at all, I confess that I cannot say with you, that matters are in any degree settled."

“ I did not say that there was danger either now or prospectively,” replied Fergus. “ On the contrary, I tell you that our friends are free ; at all events, that Government no longer holds a rod over their heads.”

“ And is a rod held over them by any other party ?” demanded the Parson.

“ Upon my honour ! Mr. Macpherson,” replied Fergus, half in anger, “ you push your inquiries somewhat too far. If I am satisfied that all is as it ought to be, who shall pretend to throw a doubt upon the subject ?”

“ No one, Ardmore,” answered the Parson, “ provided you be satisfied. But, are you satisfied ? You are not, and I must tell you frankly, that I believe you have no cause to be.”

“ That is to say, you wish to have other proofs than my bare affirmation. You shall have them then. There, read that letter, and the deed of release which accompanies it ; and tell me whether Duart has not acted like a man of honour, and to the full extent of his ability.”

Parson Neil perused the documents slowly

and deliberately, as if he were anxious to weigh the full import of every word and sentence, ere he presumed to pass judgment upon them. He then raised his eyes from the papers, and without giving them back into the hand which was already held out to receive them, said with perfect coolness,

“ I see nothing here to affect, in the slightest degree, the opinion which I formerly took the freedom to express ; except, indeed, that it gives to that opinion a thousand times more of authority than I could then claim for it. This is no release, Ardmore. It is a mere announcement that, for the present, proceedings are suspended ; though whether by the temporary settlement of the claim, or its total abandonment, we are left to form our own conjectures. And as to the rest, it truly amounts to what I all along supposed : a string of promises to be accomplished, or not, according to the turn up of the dice. You do not pretend to say that this satisfies you ? ”

“ It may, or it may not, Mr. Macpherson,” replied Fergus, “ but, in either case, I can discover nothing which ought to shake my con-

fidence in Duart. And were the contrary the effect of this letter, how are we to proceed ? It is very easy to raise doubts both in your own mind and mine, but it is a very different matter to appease them. Yet that, after all, is the real question ; for, to be frank with you, I see so much of misery on Marcellly's brow, and feel so much of remorse in my own bosom, that let the consequences be what they might, I should not scruple to dissolve this connexion at once, were I fairly satisfied, that by so doing, I committed no breach of duty to my chief and my name. But it is worse than folly to break off, on a bare suspicion, what was deliberately, and with eyes open, contracted."

" You say truly," replied the Parson, " and it was precisely with the view of settling that question, or rather of suggesting a ready means so to do, that I forced myself even now into your presence. Now listen while I propound my scheme. The old leaven of malice and revenge is at work, and the old instruments of gratifying these unholy passions are engaged. It is in our power to turn them from instruments of evil into instruments of good.

Elspeth continues grateful for the treatment which her son received at our hands, and is ready to obey my wishes now, as she has hitherto done. She has been consulted as to the most effectual means of putting a stop to this negotiation, which is understood to go forward not more by your wish than by that of Marcellly; and she has solicited a few hours for deliberation, in order that I may direct her in the counsel which it may be expedient to give. There is no difficulty here. We want information—the other party desires to provoke a quarrel between Duart and yourself. Nothing is more easy than to suggest a transaction which shall certainly secure our object; and may, though not necessarily, bring about the result which is sought for elsewhere.

“ You are doubtless aware, that ever since Duart’s visit, the intercourse between him and friends at Inverary, has been remarkably frequent. Couriers pass daily, sometimes twice a day, from the one point to the other; and it needs but an ordinary stock of common sense to surmise the nature of the business under discussion. Duart is trying the real value of

that interest of which he boasts ; and without a doubt, the fates of Mac Diarmid and of yourself are under consideration. What then ? Might not one of these messengers be robbed by the agents of another, and you and I examine the contents of his mail-bag. If these be confirmative of Duart's boasting, nothing will be so easy as to appease his wrath ; and if, as I fully anticipate, he be convicted of wilful deceit, then may we hold his anger cheap, and thank Heaven that we have incurred it. He cannot, even in this case, deal more harshly with us, than he would have done but for this unhappy marriage contract."

" But how avoid involving ourselves in the consequences of the robbery ?" demanded Fergus eagerly. " I own to you, that, situated as we are, feelings of delicacy have lost their power with me ; for, if Duart be deceiving us, we are justified in fighting him with his own weapons : if not, the hardship of our case may well excuse a worse crime. But I would not choose to have my name mixed up with such a transaction ; nor, I presume, would you."

“Leave all that to me,” replied the Parson; “there are those at my command who would not scruple to do a darker deed, and perish afterwards, without betraying their employer. Besides, I know my men sufficiently to be able to undertake, that beyond the single act of easing the courier of his despatches, no outrage whatever shall be offered to his person or property. All that I desire, therefore, is your sanction to the measure, and a pledge that you will be determined either in continuing, or putting an end to the whole affair, according as we find a confirmation of our suspicions, or the reverse. Does this content you?”

“It must, Neil, it must; for I cannot any longer conceal that I see things now in a very different light from that in which they appeared only a week ago. Those papers which you hold in your hand have staggered all my faith in Duart’s powers: yet the difficulties of my position are such, that I cannot, without more decisive proof, either go on or draw back from this unfortunate contract. Let me know the truth, then, at all hazards; for if Marcellly

must be brought to the shambles, we shall, at least, have the full price for so dire a sacrifice."

Parson Neil did not delay to discuss the point farther, but returning to Fergus the documents which he had hitherto detained, hurried off to put his machinery in motion. This was speedily effected. From old Elspeth he had received early intelligence of Mrs. Mac Diarmid's visit, and of the purpose which she desired to effect ; and as it was at his suggestion that the measure actually adopted was proposed, so was the enterprise conducted throughout with a view to serve his purposes. It is true that Ranald forgot, in the hurry of the moment, to bear in mind one of the Parson's most pressing injunctions ; for he not only eased the courier of his despatches, but took away his purse also. But the main end of the enterprise was very satisfactorily accomplished, without the slightest injury to the man's person. Nor was the information conveyed in that important packet very different from what had been expected. There were but two official letters, both of them cold and formal, of which the purport

was, that clemency extended to any one bearing the name of Mac Diarmid would be altogether misapplied, and that his Grace expected that the orders which he had repeatedly and positively issued would be carried into force. "It is an object of importance with the King's Government," continued one of these despatches, "that the rebels be cut off from all means of support; and hence his Grace expects that you will neglect no opportunity of removing the inbiding tenantry from their lands. As to your request that the farm of Doolatre be given up to your nephew, Mac Alpine of Braerorin, his Grace does not object to it; only let the entire race be extirpated with as little delay as possible."

Along with these public documents came a private communication from one of the meaner attendants on the court at Inverary, with whom it was easy to perceive that Duart's interests entirely lay. In it several allusions were made to what the writer was pleased to term the "petticoat affair which his correspondent had in hand;" and which he recommended

that the said correspondent would in no respect permit to interfere with his more solid prospects. “ If you can accomplish both purposes,” said this precious epistle, “ do so by all means. The lassie may be very toothsome, and I doubt not is sae; and if a little bamboozling and some delay will make you sure of her, you may confidently rely on my good offices for the space of a month: but beyond that I can answer for nothing, unless it be, that a clean sweep will alone satisfy Macullamore. I have had some trouble to keep all quiet up to this present time, and for longer than a month I enter into no engagement.”

The friends read these letters in the Fumart’s Cave by the light of a pine torch, the Parson having received the packet from Ranald in the wood beyond, and hastened thither to await the coming of Fergus.

“ And what say ye now?” asked Neil, as he refolded the papers, and made a movement as if to patch up the broken seals.

“ Say!” replied Fergus, grinding his teeth: “ that the villainy of Duart is equalled only by

my extravagant blindness, which well deserves this, and a thousand times more. But why replace the seal upon these papers?"

" Because the scoundrel shall have them after all, and we shall enjoy the satisfaction of seeing how well or how ill he contrives to play the liar and the cheat. Your zeal shall recover for him his lost treasure; you shall, with your own hands, deliver it up, and I mistake the matter greatly, if that bloated countenance of his fail to afford us some amusement, at all events."

" It shall be so, Neil," replied Fergus with a ghastly smile. " How all this is to end I cannot guess; but, in the mean while, from the bottom of my heart I thank you. Nay more. I do not hesitate to tell you now, what I might have told you long ago, that the contemplation of poor Marcell's fate, even when I believed all that fancy conjured up, was worse than a thousand deaths. I could have borne it, doubtless; I did bear it, and would have gone through with it as a stern duty:—but at this moment I feel like a wretch withdrawn from beneath the axe just as it was raised to strike.

Neil, I shall never forget this act of kindness on your part. Much we already owe to you, but this renders us a thousand and a thousand fold your debtors."

The friends cordially embraced and separated,—Fergus to sleep soundly for the first time since this affair came on ; Neil, to restore to Ranald, with proper instructions, the mailbag, which he had merely borrowed.

CHAPTER IX.

IT is said of evil tidings that they travel fast ; and the observation, whether true or false in other instances, was fully verified with reference to Red Ranald's desperate exploit. Within the space of twelve hours after the robbery had been perpetrated, the fact was known to almost every inhabitant of the district ; and the feeling which it excited among the various ranks and classes was everywhere the same. Aware of the disposition of the Government towards them, knowing from long experience that an opportunity of ruining the clan would not only be taken advantage of, but that it was eagerly sought—men listened to the

rumour in silent dismay ; and looked forward to the future somewhat in the same frame of mind with which they would have watched a gathering thunder-storm. No useless complaints or execrations were heard. They beheld their situation in too just a light to give vent in words either to anger or sorrow ; but, folding their arms, appeared to await, in desperate resignation, whatever consequences might follow.

In the mean while Duart, made aware of the insult offered to his messenger, laboured under an excess of emotion for which a common observer might have found it difficult to account. Had the case been one of ordinary violence, it was well known that he was not the man to have taken it very deeply to heart ; indeed, it may be questioned whether he would have considered himself bound to charge an entire sept with participating in the offence, even though the individual wronged was a public servant. But in the present act there was something which affected him much more deeply than any insult offered either to his own authority, or to the authority of those whom he served.

Rumour spoke of the deed as that of a desperate individual — a well-known outcast from the society of his clan ; but to common rumour Duart gave little credence. A strong suspicion flashed across his mind, that, somehow or other, persons above the sphere of Red Ranald were implicated ; and his own conscience told him, that if the case were so, they might find among the plunder that which, in their own eyes at least, would palliate the crime. This suspicion gradually gathered strength, till it partook at last of the nature of conviction, and wrought, as it might be expected to do, many and striking changes on the temper of his mind. His first impulse was that of ungovernable rage. He would avenge the insult in such a manner as that all Scotland should ring with the tale. He would not leave a Mac Diarmid in the country, except as a bond-slave and a menial : he would drive every gentleman and tacksman from his home, and lay waste the country with fire and sword. But an hour or two of cool reflection taught him the folly of all this, and he determined to act with per-

fect composure, though with inexorable firmness.

As the affair was involved in a good deal of mystery, and his suspicions might, after all, prove groundless, Duart resolved to commence operations with a display of extreme generosity. He issued no proclamation, nor sent in any report to the Lord Justiciary ; indeed he abstained from all measures calculated to excite an opinion unfavourable to the clemency which it was his object to affect. He contented himself, therefore, with despatching to Ardmore a written remonstrance against the outrage, and gave notice at the same time that he should proceed with as little delay as possible to investigate the affair on the spot where the crime was perpetrated. This done, he seemed to those about him to have dismissed the circumstance entirely from his mind ; for even his preparations for the investigation were all made as if he were perfectly indifferent in what such inquiry might terminate.

It was towards the close of the fourth day after the above despatches reached Ardmore,

that Duart, attended only by a Writer from Fort William, and a single servant, was seen advancing up the avenue. He rode abreast of the notary, and appeared from the careless expression in his countenance, to be engaged in light and ordinary conversation ; indeed his manner was mirthful, if not jocular — for he laughed loud and often, as men are apt to do when totally delivered from care. In like manner, his meeting with Ardmore exhibited no symptoms either of embarrassment or anxiety. There was a cordial pressure of the hand, a greeting short but kindly, and a prompt acquiescence in the customary invitation to share the hospitality of the place. Indeed, it was not till after they had been some time closeted together, that any reference was made to the business about to be brought before them. Nor even then was the subject introduced except in a tone bordering upon levity. “ It was a foolish accident — a provoking affair — one of those mishaps which could not be guarded against — and no doubt a colouring might be given to it, which would enable them to end where they began, without troubling the higher

authorities on the subject. Of course the robber was in custody ; for if he had been rightly informed, the fellow scarcely endeavoured to conceal himself. But however this might be, he did not doubt that arrangements could be made such as would relieve him from the distressing necessity of acting even as the instrument of harm to friends whom he esteemed so highly."

There was but one mode in which this address could be met, and Ardmore, who came not behind his companion in subtilty, readily embraced it. "He expected nothing less from the well-known generosity of Duart. It was quite true, as far as his inquiries enabled him to form a judgment, that the robbery was the act of one desperate individual, and it certainly would have been an extremely hard case had the innocent suffered for the guilty. Nevertheless, he knew too well what had occurred elsewhere to nourish any other hope than that which was founded upon his acquaintance with Duart's character, and he rejoiced, though indeed he was not surprised, that his anticipations should be thus confirmed."

Duart bowed, repeated much that he had said already, and concluded by reiterating his assurance that the plunderer was in custody. “Red Ranald, I think he is called,” continued he, “a desperate outlaw and cateran, connected somehow or other with your old friend and kinsman Glenarroch. You have secured him, of course, and are prepared to hand him over to my excellent friend, Peter Playfause, Writer in Fort William, and sheriff substitute for the County of Argyle. We must make an example of him, at any rate, and put a few questions to him for form’s sake.”

“I am sorry to say,” replied Ardmore, “that the scoundrel has contrived to elude our vigilance. There can be no doubt as to his guilt, and we have done our best to take him, but hitherto without success.”

“That is unfortunate,” observed Duart, more gravely, “very unfortunate. Even an ordinary deed of violence could scarcely be overlooked unless the perpetrator were produced; and how to hush up such an offence

as this — upon my word, it is truly unfortunate."

"I deplore it as much as you can," replied Fergus, "but possess no power to remedy the evil. If we be right in our conjectures respecting the robber—and his absence from his mother's funeral would seem to attest that we are—it is certain that the whole compass of the Highlands contains not a more daring ruffian, or one more perfectly at home in the art of eluding pursuit. You may rely upon it, however, that our exertions shall not be intermitted till the most perfect success attend them."

"That may be," rejoined Duart, "but in the mean while what am I to say to Macullamore? His courier is stopped, his despatches are taken away on the lands of Mac Diarmid—ay, and at the very gate of Ardmore—and, after all, neither I nor Ardmore can give any account of the transaction. We neither produce the robber, nor restore the plundered packet."

"It is not impossible that the latter object may be accomplished," replied Fergus. "Some of my people have traced the plunderer to one

of his haunts, and I am in momentary expectation of their return. That they will surprise the caitiff himself, I do not anticipate ; but they may recover, if not all, at least a part of the property stolen."

"Soho!" replied Duart, with a peculiar cast of the eye, and an intonation of voice expressive of suspicion : "the land lies there, does it ! Well, something will be gained at all events, if we recover our lost treasure, and the readiness with which it is found may possibly lead to other and not less important discoveries. Possibly your people may be returned by this time : had we not better ascertain ?"

"It is very possible," replied Fergus coolly ; "indeed I see at this moment the leader of the party approaching. Shall I order him in, or——"

"We had better see him in private," interrupted Duart : "Mr. Playfause will leave us to examine into the matter by ourselves ; and as soon as the preliminaries have been arranged, we will again avail ourselves of his assistance."

The obsequious Writer acting upon the hint

thus conveyed, quitted the apartment, and Duart and Ardmore were left alone together.

For a few moments after the door had closed, the gentlemen remained silent. There was a restraint, moreover, upon their bearing, which indicated plainly enough that fancy was busy with both, and they threw, the one upon the other, occasional furtive glances, as if each had been anxious to read the other's thoughts, without permitting his own to be exposed. At length, Duart spoke.

“ You have placed me in an awkward predicament, Ardmore. The relation which I bear towards you, determinate, yet uncertain in its issue, renders me powerless over myself, like a good swimmer, with his hands tied, in deep water. For both our sakes, I wish either that this contract were nearer its completion, or that it had never been entered into at all.”

“ I do not quite follow you,” replied Ardmore coolly. “ The contract is of your own seeking, and the terms of it such as met your full approbation ; but were it not so, I am at a

loss to perceive how it can affect the matter before us."

"Look you, neighbour," rejoined Duart, in a stern tone, "you and I are now so circumstanced, that there need be little of concealment between us. We are here without witnesses, and may therefore speak what we think. I don't believe that Red Ranald committed this robbery ; or, if he did, I do believe that he obeyed the orders of his betters."

"You are perfectly at liberty, Duart, to believe or disbelieve what you please, so long as you take care not to give the lie to me, either directly or indirectly."

"Pooh, pooh, man," replied Duart, "this is not the time for heroics. If you so much dislike the word lie, why I will take care not to utter it ; but if you expect me to credit the current story anent this transaction, then you take me for a greater fool than I am. Ardmore, *you* had a hand in the transaction."

"I, Duart !" demanded Ardmore warmly ; "how dare you lay such an accusation to my charge ? Nay more," continued he in a sub-

dued tone, “what possible motive could I have for such an act?”

“I shall better judge of that,” replied Duart, “when I have seen the letters which your agents have recovered. Admit them, I pray you, and we will resume our conference on more equal grounds.”

Ardmore did as he was desired, by commanding the men to be introduced. They handed to him a despatch-case, and stated without reserve all that had befallen them while prosecuting their search,—that they had watched in vain at the shieling on the moss-hag, that they had examined every crevice without discovering any thing, and that they were about to return in despair, when they accidentally learned from one of the women who had waked old Elspeth how Ranald had disposed of his prize. Finally, that they proceeded, after a good deal of hesitation, to Glenarroch, demanded an audience of the lady, and required that the packet should be given up to them. “Her Ladyship was unco laith at first to part wi’t,” continued one of them;

"but whan we telt her that Ardmore bet to be obeyed, she just made a merit of necessity, and here it is."

"You have done well," said Ardmore, "and now you may withdraw." The men obeyed, and the gentlemen were once more left to consort together as they best might.

"Are you satisfied now, Duart?" demanded Ardmore, as soon as the door closed.

"So far, certainly," replied Duart, "that my suspicions touching the interference of some higher authority than that of Red Ranald are every way confirmed. If my memory serve me aright, there was once a project of marriage between young Glenarroch and your daughter."

"I have never heard of it before. Young Glenarroch did, I believe, seek such an alliance, but his suit received no encouragement either from Marcella or myself."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," rejoined Duart, as he hastily undid the case, and turned the letters round with a rapid hand. They were sealed, but a scrutinizing eye might easily detect that the seals had been broken. Duart noticed this, but abstained from remarking on

the circumstance, while he hastily tore them open, and ran over their contents. But the accomplishment of that task seemed to rouse to greater fury than ever the evil passions which for a time had slumbered. “Look you, Ardmore,” exclaimed he sternly, “I am not a man to be trifled with, and you know that I am not. There is a mystery about the whole of this matter such as you, perhaps, may be able to unravel, though I cannot; and greatly as I desire to befriend you, both for your sake and my own, I cannot sacrifice my personal character to any minor consideration. The affair must undergo the scrutiny of a higher authority than mine. A near kinswoman of yours is implicated in the robbery,—your people trace this circumstance out without difficulty, and you yourself express neither surprise nor indignation at it. How am I to know that others are not mixed up in the plot as well as she?”

“Why should you suspect any thing of the kind?” demanded Ardmore in a half contemptuous tone: “What possible motive could induce any human being to read—I beg pardon

—to intercept your despatches? The Lady Glenarroch might, to skreen a foster-brother, consent to become the depositary of his plunder; but except on that account I cannot conceive what even a curious woman could expect to find in such letters as yours. Affairs of state—and the intimate friend of Macullamore doubtless holds correspondence with the Justiciary on little else—are not likely to interest a lone widow in Strath-Diarmid."

"Ardmore," said Duart coolly, "you have read these letters."

"I, Duart! In God's name how should I do such a thing?"

"You distrusted my assurances; you could not otherwise remove that distrust, and you preferred putting your own neck in the noose, and hazarding the existence of your clan, to the endurance of suspense any longer. Is it not so?"

"By my faith! Duart, and if it were so, I should say that you were no bad judge of human nature."

"I guessed as much all along," replied Duart. "And now hear me. Whether I pos-

sess or do not possess the power to realize all your absurd expectations respecting the restoration of Mac Diarmid, and the remission of the Government demands, is no longer a matter of the smallest moment. This mad act of yours places you entirely in my power. It may be difficult to bring the matter home to yourself,—perhaps impossible; but the circumstance that such a robbery has been perpetrated by one of your accursed race will serve every purpose. Take then your choice—either give me your daughter in marriage within one week, or prepare to suffer all that the outraged laws can award. Nay, hear me out, man. *I* am as cool as ever *I* was in my life, and not even the knowledge that you have discovered—basely indeed, but still effectually, what *I* wished to conceal—in the smallest degree ruffles me. Therefore do *you* keep your temper at all events, while *I* assure you that even now *I* mean to deal as mercifully with you as need be. For the present this heavy charge shall be kept back. We can do so with perfect safety to ourselves, on the plea of investigating the circumstances fully; but if by this day

week your daughter is not my wife, every farthing of rent due shall be rigidly exacted, and every defaulter expelled. Should you still continue obstinate, then, with God's blessing ! worse shall come of it."

" Have you done ?" replied Ardmore contemptuously, " for if so, I will speak. Pitiful, pettifogging miscreant, take my defiance, and begone ! Do your worst ; I dare you to do it. Levy your distresses—drive forth better men than yourself to beg or to starve—bring down upon my head all the fury of the law—but never, while my name is Mac Diarmid, shall Marcella be your bride. Your interest with Macullamore—your power and inclination to preserve an ancient and an honourable name—your anxiety to be connected with us, in order that you might shelter us under the wing of your kindred — Bah, bah ! my very stomach turns to think of it. Begone ! lest I forget what is due to myself, and do upon your worthless carcass a deed that would defile the fingers that performed it."

" It is well," replied Duart as he hastily moved towards the door ; " I have deserved this

for my folly in suing for that which I was every way entitled to demand. But my hour is coming, and when it does come, then will you offer in vain what has lost its value. Playfause, our horses—lead out the horses—we will look to this again. It is a more complicated matter than I had imagined, and must be formally proceeded in. Defied ! and by you ! Well, it is a pleasant termination to the wooing !—hah ! hah ! hah ! mighty pleasant, I do declare ! But no matter—I still give you a week,—one week, mind you, and no more. And I will still take you by degrees, the less before the greater. However, my revenge will be the sweeter if you persist in your obstinacy, and your ruin will be doubly on your own head."

All this Duart muttered, rather than spoke aloud, as with hasty steps he descended the stairs. No sooner, however, did he find himself in the saddle than he turned round, and with his usual benignant smile wished Ardmore good-morning. The latter stared with astonishment, and scarcely recovered from it ere a turn in the avenue had shut out the figures of the little cavalcade from his view.

CHAPTER X.

THE first movement of Ardmore's feelings drove him to seek his daughter, and to communicate to her the results of an interview which had terminated thus strangely. With this view he hastened to her apartment, where he was received with the same fondness which had ever marked her manner, though with a solemnity which he had not till recently been accustomed to observe in it. He beheld, too, with unfeigned concern, that her cheek was pale, that already the effects of care were beginning to show themselves in her wasting form ; and a pang of something like remorse shot across his heart as he remembered that her sufferings,

though not very protracted, were entirely owing to him. That consciousness threw into his mode of address more than the degree of tenderness which usually distinguished it: he folded Marcella in his arms, and imprinting a kiss upon her forehead, prayed God to bless her.

Marcella was greatly moved, and the tears rose in her eyes as she returned her father's embrace; and though the smile with which she strove to cover them was languid and sorrowful, it told a tale of deep affection and devoted obedience. Ardmore saw and fully understood the silent language of that smile. He kissed her again, and drawing a chair close to hers, began at once to break the subject to her. But at first he found but an unwilling auditor. She reminded him of the pledge which he had given, that no allusion should be made to her engagement till the period of its fulfilment drew near, and she implored him, as he valued the preservation of her reason, not to violate that pledge. Ardmore smiled as he took her hand within his, and assured her that he had not forgotten his promises. “But the circum-

stances of our case are changed," continued he ; " a new light has broken in upon us, and the probationary year has vanished like a shadow, and is not——"

" What do you mean, sir ?" asked Marcellly faintly ; " surely I am not expected to make further sacrifices ? Surely the single condition for which I stipulated will be adhered to ?"

" Not it, indeed, child," replied Ardmore ; " your year of grace is gone, and the whole concern assumes a new aspect. What say you, are you content ?"

" For mercy's sake spare me this raillyery," exclaimed she with great bitterness : " if there are further demands to be made upon my self-devotion, state them at once ; but do not torment me with suspense and levity."

" Dearest Marcellly," cried he in a different tone, " there are no further demands to be made upon your self-devotion : on the contrary I feel like a reprieved criminal when I tell you, that even that sacrifice which you consented to make shall no longer be exacted. Marcellly, you are free from all engagements. Duart has played false ; he has demanded you within a week, and

on my refusal to comply with his demand, the whole affair is off. You are free, child, free as the air."

"And the arrears, and our kinsmen, and our chief,—what is to become of all these?" demanded she hurriedly, yet with an expression of the keenest and most radiant joy dancing in her eyes.

"They are exactly as they were before, and as they would have been, had you, my own darling treasure, submitted to the degradation which I was so wicked as to propose. The scoundrel never possessed the power of aiding us as he said; we discovered his baseness in time, and you, at least, are saved, whatever may be the fate that awaits us."

We will not attempt to describe the working of those mixed sensations to which this announcement gave rise in the bosom of Marcella. Her first feeling was, as it was natural that it should be, that of purely selfish satisfaction. A mountain was removed from her chest; she breathed again, and the terrible cloud which had so long overshadowed her soul was taken away. The fate, to which death

would have been a thousand times preferable, was avoided, and she was at liberty to look to the future with hope. But bright and joyous as these visions were, they could not hinder her from experiencing intense anxiety as she began to reflect upon the desperate condition of her father's affairs. It was to retrieve these that she stood prepared to put violence on herself, and they were now, it appeared, beyond the reach of human interference. What then must follow? He had told her, when arguing the question of her marriage, that unless she consented, he would spend the evening of his days in exile,—possibly in a gaol. Then, again, the ruin of the whole clan was inevitable. Yet could she hinder the one, or avert the other? No,—the same voice which had formerly invited her to lay her head upon the block, now gave the assurance that no good result could follow from her doing so. She might lament, therefore, a destiny as harsh as it was unmerited, but seeing that she possessed no power to ameliorate its character, from self-upbraiding she was entirely free. There was, therefore, no check upon her joy at all adequate to

counterbalance the satisfaction which every human being experiences, who, having undertaken to make some extensive personal sacrifice in order to accomplish some great general good, finds all at once that his moral merits are preserved to him, while the physical privations which he had braced himself to suffer will not be required at his hands.

In the mean while rumours of what had passed at the hurried meeting between Duart and Ardmore began to circulate throughout the country. Of the price at which Marcella had undertaken to purchase the forbearance of the Government, the clansmen were already aware ; and beloved as she was among them, there was not a man that did not openly affirm that too much had been required at her hands. It was not creditable to the clan,—it was a personal injury done to one of its most distinguished chieftains, that his only child should be given away, in a species of barter, to a rascally agent of Macullamore. Such was the language held so long as the arrangement was understood to be final, and numerous defaulters believed that it left them in secure possession of their lands.

But human nature is pretty much the same on either side of the Highland line. No sooner was the rumour spread that the marriage contract had come to nothing, than a new light seemed to have broken in upon the minds of many. “What was the meaning of all this? Had not the arrangements been made to every body’s satisfaction? What could induce Ardmore thus to trifle with the very salvation of his kinsmen? It was true that he had put considerable violence both on his own feelings and on those of Marcella, and had they been consulted in the first instance, they would have negatived the arrangement altogether,—but to withdraw now, after men’s scruples were overcome,—after the young lady herself was reconciled and her kinsmen content,—they could not understand any good reason for it. It was an act of cruelty towards themselves, whom Ardmore had deluded by the excitement of false hopes; it was disloyal towards the chief, whose restoration had been stipulated for.” Such was now the language everywhere held throughout the strath, and the persons who uttered it were too much engrossed with their

own desperate circumstances to pay heed either to the replies of such as desired to reason with them, or to the suggestions of nobler feelings ; for the facts upon which Ardmore regulated his proceedings were necessarily kept secret from all except his own immediate associates. To have revealed these would have been not only to expose himself to almost certain destruction, but to involve the clan at large in his ruin ; for though he had no cause to doubt the fidelity of any individual among them, he knew that a secret committed even to three persons ceases at once to be a secret. An arduous and a delicate task, therefore, was still left to him to perform,—namely, to bring over his neighbours to the adoption of his own views ; and to aid him in so doing he was without other assistance than that which Parson Neil might be able to afford.

It may not be, for aught we know to the contrary, a very hard matter, in the politics either of a clan or a nation to turn men from one way of thinking to another, so long as their own personal interests do not appear to be in any degree involved in the question under discussion.

It is the easiest thing in the world to make converts, provided only your arguments be bolstered up with firm assurances of personal aggrandizement to such as weigh them aright ; but he who sets about to propagate opinions confessedly at variance with the private views of his neighbours, attempts that to which the labours of Hercules were the merest trifle. Parson Neil, on ordinary occasions, exercised great authority over the minds of his flock. In matters of faith he was their oracle. Sailing with the current in his abhorrence of the House of Hanover, everybody received his statements on that head with deference ; and even in the common transactions between man and man, his award was generally taken as final. But he had now a widely different card to play. He appealed to the honour and manliness of one,—to the good feeling and humanity of another ; he reminded a third of the language which he had himself used when the affairs of the district were discussed,—but he found one and all engrossed with a consideration of their own impending ruin, as well as the melancholy

fate of the chief to whom all were equally devoted. As a last resource, he invited the principal gentlemen to a meeting, and it was arranged that they should assemble at Ardmore; and the meeting was held accordingly. But little benefit accrued from it: no one, indeed, went so far as to urge that Marcellly should yet be sacrificed, though many voices gave utterance to complaints such as they had never uttered before, and the conclave broke up under the influence even of more stormy passions than those which its promoter had designed to allay.

In this manner day after day passed on. There were repeated conferences, sometimes at one point, sometimes at another, but the question what was to be done seemed as far from receiving a satisfactory answer as ever. Time, in the mean while, held his course, and the interval of eight days was all but expended, for it was already drawing towards evening on the seventh, and the difficulties of the Mac Diarmids were in no respect diminished. They had met, however, in greater numbers than before, to give to the point a final discussion,

and now crowded, with the principal tacksmen and retainers, the dining-room at Ardmore. Among them sat the laird, with Parson Neil as his supporter, vainly striving to soothe and argue with men whose cases were desperate; indeed, a scene impended very different from any that had occurred in the strath since its original conquest.

“ You have not dealt fairly by us, Ardmore,” exclaimed one: “ you led us to believe that all was fixed, and now you turn round upon us suddenly, and say that we are at the mercy of Duart. Better perish like men, than die like dogs ! For my part I will hold Ballochguil till the last drop in my veins has moistened its hearth.”

“ And what am I to do ?” exclaimed another ; “ the decree of court is out against me. But for you I might have made some arrangements to meet it,—or at the worst I could have tried what effect a little supplication would have, and the tender of secret service. But now, God help me ! I must flit to-morrow, and carry my wife and children to perish in the snow-drift.”

“And how am I circumstanced better than any of you?” demanded Ardmore. “Is there not a wadset over my property as well as over yours? and am I likely to be dealt with more tenderly than you? I tell you again that there is no help for it. If Duart will press these matters on, we cannot stay his hand; and since we must go, surely it is better to go together like kinsmen and fellow-sufferers, than to quarrel about evils for which there is no remedy.”

“But there is a remedy,” answered a third sternly: “you have either deceived us throughout, or Duart may be bribed to forbearance even now. No doubt the alternative is not pleasant to any of us, and to you it may be terrible, but it was not of our proposing.”

“How often must I assure you, gentlemen,” interposed the Parson, “that our situation is very different now from what it was a few weeks ago? Ardmore had then to make his bargain. He made it. He agreed, at the expense of his own peace, and the peace of his only daughter, to betroth her, on certain conditions, to Duart. Duart assented to these,

and the matter was arranged. But now Duart breaks faith, not Ardmore; and what was practicable then, ceases to be so now. Why blame Ardmore for this?"

"But how is it that Duart breaks faith?" demanded a fourth; "he is still ready to forbear, on condition of having Marcella for his bride. He only requires that she shall become such immediately, instead of a year hence. For my part I see nothing in this to quibble at. If it be just to throw the lassie away at the end of twelve months, it cannot be any deadly wrong to do the same thing at the end of twelve days."

"I did not expect this from you, Achnadrone," exclaimed Ardmore bitterly. "You held a very different tone the last time we talked the matter over. It was then a public disgrace to force the girl's inclinations at all,—but now—you would cast aside even common delicacy in forcing them."

"It is your own fault, Ardmore," replied the former speaker doggedly. "By finessing too deeply, you have driven us to our last shifts; and the only alternative is, between the aban-

donment of a woman's whim, or the immediate destruction of our race. I, for one, give my voice for a renewal of the negociation with Duart, on any basis which he may propose."

"And I, and I, and I," shouted voices from all parts of the room.

"And this in the face of all your former declarations!" exclaimed the Parson: "What, drag a girl, nearly allied to your chief—a girl of whom you all profess to be proud—drag her by violence from under her father's roof, and give her to such a beast as Duart! For shame, for shame! Better perish to a man, in an effort to maintain your country, as your fathers won it by the sword; for, hopeless as that struggle might be, its issue would at least leave no dishonour on your name. But this is not all. What if Duart were deceiving us throughout? What if he possessed no power to save us from the ruin with which we are threatened, and played his own selfish game to the last?"

"No, no; that is impossible," shouted several voices at once; "we know that he is hand-and-glove with Macullamore,—at least, if

he be not, we have Ardmore's word to the contrary. Better that one should suffer than many. Marcellly must wed him whenever he chooses to demand her; there is no other resource left for us."

This exclamation was scarcely uttered when the door burst open, and there entered a fresh member of conference, on whom all eyes were instantly turned. A tall man, wrapped up in a sort of military cloak, with a slouched hat drawn closely over his brows, strode forward till he reached the table round which the gentlemen had gathered.

For a moment he stood there, his arms folded the one across the other, and the lower part of his countenance completely shrouded in his mantle, as if for the purpose of permitting some strong passion to subside, under which the heaving of his chest gave indication that he laboured. But that brief interval of silence soon passed away.

"She shall not wed him, by Heavens!" exclaimed he—as opening out his cloak, and casting aside his hat, he displayed the seamed fea-

tures and brawny form of Allan Breck—"Let me see the man that dares to make the proposal again. She shall not wed him, I say, and yet not a man among you shall suffer wrong at his hands."

In an instant the inclinations and language of the gentlemen assembled appeared to undergo a change. They stared upon the vision before them as on a supernatural being, and uttering a sort of half-cry, appeared anxious to escape from the room, as from a place infected by some fatal contagion. Allan observed the effect produced by his unlooked-for presence, and his eyes shot fire as they turned from one to the other.

"What! gentlemen," cried he, in a tone of mingled irony and rage, "is it thus you receive an old comrade? Shrink from me as if I bore a pestilence in my breath, and depart, leaving your business unsettled! Be it so—I will arrange the matter for you. In the mean time I repeat, that she shall not wed Duart, and let him that says to the contrary, look well to it."

So saying, he turned upon his heel, and without pausing to salute any one, without having made a movement of recognition, even to Parson Neil, he departed with the same abruptness which had marked his arrival.

CHAPTER XI.

STARTLING as the sudden appearance of Allan might be, it was, in reality, one of those events which are liable to happen every day, by the most ordinary of all the laws that regulate human nature. His history, indeed, since he escaped from Scotland after the fatal affair of Culloden, differed very little from the histories of by far the greater number of the most distinguished fugitives on that occasion. Having gained the sea-side, and being received on board of ship, he succeeded in making good his passage to France, where the fact that he had served the Chevalier proved a sufficient passport as far as Paris. Here he strove to obtain

employment suitable to his rank, either in the army or as a civil officer ; but, like most of his comrades, found that his applications were coldly received, and in effect totally disregarded. His stock of ready money, slender from the first, was soon expended. Among his political friends, he found few who were not equally poor with himself ; and his chief, aware of the blots which attached to his private character, exhibited manifest symptoms of coldness. Under these circumstances, Allan gladly enrolled himself as a private in that gallant corps, which Louis consented to embody out of the wreck of the Scottish adventurers. With it he served in Germany, displaying on all occasions that reckless courage which had distinguished him throughout the British campaign ; and had his moral conduct been at all in keeping with his military reputation, he might have reaped the benefit of promotion for his gallantry. But the case was not so. Dissolute, turbulent, the slave of every brutal passion, Allan Breck was nowhere respected, except in the field ; and his services there were necessarily on too limited a scale to cause his

errors in other situations to be forgotten. At the close of the war, he remained in the same subordinate grade in which he had been enrolled at its commencement.

The return of peace, by throwing him more and more upon his own resources, served only to lower Allan in the estimation of his comrades, as well as to humble him in his own. It was to no purpose that he strove to dispel care by rushing headlong into dissipation. His countrymen everywhere shunned him, and of the natives themselves, only the lowest and most debased would receive him on a footing of familiarity, till in the end his situation became perfectly insupportable, and he resolved to change it. But he was too poor to enter upon any novel enterprize in a land of strangers, and too imperfectly educated, to venture beyond the circle within which his native language was spoken. Allan's thoughts began insensibly to direct themselves homewards. Even in his ill-regulated mind, there arose, from time to time, recollections of other days, when his principles were as yet uncorrupt, and his life unstained with heavy crimes; and a

yearning desire to behold once more the scenes of his youth, took possession of his whole soul. In spite of the dangers attending a voyage to Scotland, he applied for, and obtained permission to absent himself for a time from his regiment, and he quitted France with the secret, though settled determination, never, except impelled by an irresistible necessity, to visit it again.

The ship in which Allan took his passage, being bound for the Clyde, he made arrangements with the master to put him on shore somewhere on the northern bank, so as that the dangers which might attend even a brief sojourn in Glasgow should be avoided. The agreement was rigidly fulfilled; indeed the skipper himself, at heart a Jacobite, had been too often employed in similar services not to understand his present situation perfectly; and hence Allan's progress from Brest to Argyleshire was marked by the occurrence of no memorable adventure. But as he drew towards his native strath, even Allan's hardened nature became sensible of impressions to which

it had long been a stranger. The memory of other times rushed back upon his mind with overwhelming force. All the vices and follies of which he had been guilty, all the hours of innocent delight which he had passed there, rose in one confused dream before the eye of his mind, and he feared to make himself known lest his nearest of kin should disown him, and the only spot on earth where he had hoped to find a resting-place for the sole of his foot should cast him forth. Nor were other feelings absent on this eventful occasion. His passion for Marcellly, which neither time nor change of scene had effaced, seemed to recover, so soon as he breathed his native air, its original force, and carried him back, painfully, humbly, almost despairingly, to the evening on which he had bidden her all but an eternal farewell. Then again there was the image of his mother—his mother whom he had ever loved; on whom he still doated with all the fondness of which his nature was capable. Allan could not contemplate these varied pictures, without experiencing emotions to which his heart had long been

a stranger. He sat down upon a grey stone by the way-side, buried his face in his hands, and wept bitterly.

Indifferent to fatigue, and regardless of what most men would account hardships, Allan performed his journey on foot, his baggage consisting simply of a little bundle, which he carried in his hand, and a small wallet slung round his shoulder, containing a morsel of bread and a piece of cheese. Though the winter had begun to set in, the weather was still so mild that he suffered little inconvenience of any kind ; and even his rude couch among the heather on the bare hill-side, was pressed with resignation, if not with satisfaction. For it constituted a permanent feature in his plan to enter his native valley unperceived, and, ere he made himself known, to ascertain, as far as circumstances would allow, the condition and sentiments of his clan. But though he so far succeeded in the attainment of that object as to traverse the intervening space unnoticed, the first intelligence that reached him on approaching the marches of his father-land, caused an immediate revolution in his designs.

There is an arm of the sea on the southern frontier of the Mac Diarmid country, as well as along its western face, which it was necessary that he should cross. He entered the cobble cautiously—for the face of the rower was familiar to him, and, sitting down in the stern, drew his cloak closely round him: after which, in a feigned voice, he began, as a perfect stranger, to inquire into the general state of the country. The ferryman's answers were at first vague and destitute of all interest; but, as his passenger drew him on, additional facts were communicated, to which Allan listened with breathless attention. He was told of the atrocities perpetrated by the Royal troops,—of the distress to which the natives were long subjected,—of the exile of the chief,—the breaking up of the clan,—and many matters besides, of which he already knew the substance, though the particulars had hitherto been withheld from him. Then came an account of Ardmore's arrangements with Duart; of the cleverness with which he had contrived to keep the tacksmen in possession, to meet the demands of the State, and still gather in a

pittance for the exile. “ But that’s a’ done now,” added the man, with a sigh; “ Ardmore stood it out stoutly, and so did the lave, langer than ony body wad expect: but they’re done at last, and I fear we’ve seen an end to the prosperity of Strath-Diarmid.”

“ How so, my friend?” demanded Allan: “ if your clansmen have hitherto held their own with the Government, why should they fail now?”

“ It’s no’ just that they held their ain,” replied the boatman; “ for in troth many ane among them gat sair behint: but then Ardmore had ta’en the measure of the factor’s foot, and kent how to fit him. But somehow or anaether, they are all agree noo, and by this time the morn, there will be sad wark in the strath. And yet I cannot say that I blame Ardmore for it neither. It was an awfu’ thing to force his ain dochter to sic a marriage as that, and her sae gude and so bonny.”

“ What marriage?—what daughter?” demanded Allan eagerly.

“ ’Od, I’m thinking ye maun be a stranger, after a’,” observed the boatman suspiciously,

“ though you do ken sae muckle about the kintra and its inhabitants : and my tongue has been running nineteen to the dozen, though my wits couldna keep pace wi’ it. But be ye wha ye may, there’s nae harm in telling you what a’ the country-side kens by this time, that Ardmore had promised his dochter to Duart in consideration o’ certain remittances of arrears, and that within this eight days he has rued, and brake the bargain. What for he has done sae, whether out of a natural pity for the lassie, or because Duart gae him ground of personal offence, I cannot tell ; but the match was aff yestreen, and is no’ likely to come on again.”

“ Thank God !” muttered Allan, though not so softly as to be inaudible to his acute companion.

“ I’m no’ quite sure aboot that neither,” ejaculated the Charon. “ To Ardmore and his dochter it may be a ground of thanks for aught I know to the contrair ; but there’s mony an honest man in the strath that laments it deeply. And after all, ye may thank God yet for naething. Gin ye be ony kith or kin to Ard-

more, or take ony interest in the matter, it may be worth while to tell you, that there is a general outcry against his decision, and that this very day the gentlemen have met to insist on his abandoning it.”

“ When and where do they meet ?” demanded Allan hurriedly.

“ Where should they meet but at Ardmore itself? And as to the when, I ’m thinking the maest feck o’ them will be there even now.”

“ Give way, my good man, give way ! We shall be all day in reaching the shore, and I have a far way to travel, and much to do, ere the sun go down. Give way !—give way !”

“ Faith, an’ if she ’s in a hurry, I ’m thinking she might lend a hand herself. I ’m sure she looks able enough, gin she be willing.”

Allan half rose, as if about to act on the suggestion of the boatman ; but the recollection that he could not preserve his disguise except in a state of inaction, restrained him. He muttered something about his want of skill, and an injury which rendered him incapable of using one of his arms, and then renewed his entreaties that the man would put forth all

his strength. He was not disobeyed, for the honest boatman perceived, both from the manner and gesticulations of his fare, that something more than common impatience swayed him, and did exert himself to the utmost throughout the remainder of their brief voyage. Nor did Allan linger a single moment by the margin of the loch, so soon as the boat had touched the strand. Putting a piece of silver—a foreign coin, but intrinsically worth double the customary charge, into the Charon's hand, he leaped on shore, and, without pausing to acknowledge the salutation with which that functionary wished him God speed, he hurried forward.

About twenty miles of rough road lay between him and Ardmore, the point towards which Allan's steps were now recklessly turned. They appeared to him, by anticipation, to be interminable: yet the speed with which he set forward, caused the boatman to stare with astonishment, as he involuntarily exclaimed, “She may want the use of ain of her arms, but by my saul she kens weel how to use her legs!” And sure enough these latter members were

exercised to a very effectual purpose. It was neither a walk nor a run, but a long trot, or amble, such as men accustomed to perform pedestrian excursions find more convenient than either for purposes of speed, and which Allan contrived to press so as to compass, on a moderate computation, seven English miles within the hour.

The tract of country over which he journeyed, besides being remarkably striking in itself, was full of objects well calculated to rouse in his mind vivid and fearful recollections of the past. An hour's walk brought him, through the heart of a fertile strath, to the margin of that loch, or arm of the sea, beside which many of his happiest, and some of his most miserable hours had been spent. Far away, across its waters, uprose the giant range behind which he had watched a thousand and a thousand times the sun retire to rest, while, reposing, as it were, on its bosom, lay those islands, familiar to his eye as the faces of friends known from childhood, and from childhood beloved. Yet all the objects presented to his gaze brought not reminiscences so con-

solatory along with them. A sudden angle in the road brought him in presence of a dilapidated tower, from which he turned his eyes away with a shudder. It was the same within which Marcella had been for a brief space immured, and from which she had been so strangely delivered. Nevertheless, agonizing as the recollection of that disgraceful scene was,—and let justice be done, it was no selfish feeling that rendered it so,—even it exerted but a brief supremacy over his disordered imagination. On the contrary, it faded at once with the disappearance of the old tower which had called it into momentary existence, and his whole soul became engrossed again with one maddening thought. Marcella had been promised to another. She might be compelled to accomplish that promise: nay, it was in the highest degree probable that she would, should he fail to reach Ardmore in time to save her,—for his heart bounded as the boatman's assurance recurred to him, that she, at least, was extremely averse to the match. Never did the way appear so tedious to him, never before did time appear to fly so rapidly. At last, however,

the promontory, with the white mansion crowning its summit, rose into view. It was still broad day; indeed the sun, though approaching the western range, stood as yet conspicuous in the heavens; and Allan, casting a hasty glance towards it, made increased efforts, and pushed on.

One hurried gaze was given to the right as he approached the noble domain, within which the castle, as it was called, of the Mac Diarmids was wont to stand. It served to satisfy him that the park retained its beauty, and that the rocks that beetled over it were unchanged; but of the residence of his chief all that now remained was a heap of blackened ruins. He had seen in other quarters traces of the marauders' handywork. Many a shieling which once studded the strath stood roofless, or had entirely disappeared, and even the chapel, within whose walls he had so often listened to Parson Neil's eloquent discourses, was levelled with the earth. Allan's blood boiled. He cursed bitterly the reigning monarch, as well as the instruments of his harshness, and with passions

more and more inflamed, and a determination more and more hardened, passed on.

And now the promontory rose full in view, at the distance of three miles from him. He relaxed his speed for a moment, that he might gaze upon it more intensely; but a tear obscured his vision, and trees, house, and all the objects round, danced obscurely and hazily before him. He brushed away the drop as it fell upon his cheek, and smiled bitterly, while thoughts of other days went and came like ghosts across his mind. "It will not do, it cannot be," cried he aloud; "yet I may save her this pang at all events, and she will see that, degraded as I am, I can love disinterestedly, in spite of all that has happened." As he uttered this sentence he resumed his long trot, and gained the base of the hill just as the sun began to hide his disk behind the loftiest of the western ridges.

Allan did not approach Ardmore by any beaten path, far less by the ordinary avenue. Obeying some impulse, into the reasonableness of which he paused not to inquire, his object was still to avoid observation; so he drew his

cloak more closely round him, and, turning off to the left, threaded his way through the plantations till he reached the extreme point of the isthmus. Then he began to ascend, and gaining the summit, not far from the Fumart's Cave, found himself under cover of the garden wall, within a short distance of the back entrance. He gazed round, and saw, with indescribable satisfaction, that not a human being overlooked the space which he must needs traverse. There were voices, indeed, as of many people loitering about the front of the house,—but not a soul kept watch behind. Allan cleared the space almost at a stride, traversed a narrow passage, and gaining the door of the room where the gentlemen of the clan had met, entered as has been described. Of what followed the reader is already aware.

CHAPTER XII.

WE have said that the sudden appearance of Allan Breck among them operated upon the gentlemen assembled at Ardmore like the apparition of some one who has lain many years in his grave. A strong superstitious feeling overpowered them ; they shrank back as if a dead man had spoken, and opened a way for him to withdraw without uttering so much as a cry of surprise. Nevertheless, their eyes were all turned towards him fixedly and fearfully ; and even after his figure had disappeared, they continued to gaze upon vacancy. By and by, one after another, they hurried in silence from

the room, and in the end Ardmore and the Parson were left alone together.

Meanwhile the cause of so much alarm had passed through the midst of a crowd of idlers without, and was far advanced on his way to Glenarroch. Labouring under a degree of excitement which partook almost of insanity, he strode on in gloomy silence; with his hat once more drawn far over his brows, and his face shrowded in his cloak. In this mood he traversed the avenue, and compassed a considerable portion of the way that intervened; nor was it till he reached the knoll, where he had held his last meeting with Marcella, that any degree of calmness returned. But the very air of that spot appeared to have in it a magic power. He stopped, looked round, and casting himself prone upon the earth, gave vent to his overcharged feelings in a passion of tears.

Soothed and comforted by that most consolatory of all exercises, Allan resumed his walk in a more tranquil frame of mind than he had experienced for many years. Though the twilight was closing rapidly over him, there remained still light enough by which to distin-

guish objects with considerable accuracy, and they were all familiar to him. Now he approached the shelving rock from which his earliest lessons in swimming had been taken,—now he crossed the rivulet where he first learned to throw the fly,—and now the long avenue, with its stone posts and swinging gates, spread out before him, like the arms of a nurse that welcomes back her truant charge. It is not in the power of language to describe the effect produced upon Allan's feelings. Seared and deadened as it had long been, closed up, as it were, in a shell of selfishness and vice, his heart became once more conscious of the power of nature, and even his unfortunate attachment, with all the consequences arising out of it, were forgotten. One image, and only one, occupied his thoughts. His mother, as she was wont to be, the most tender, the most devoted of human beings, reigned sole mistress there, and he darted along the approach as if every moment that withheld him from her embrace were one of exquisite misery.

The last glimmering of the evening had expired when he gained the grass-plat in front of

that house under whose roof he had spent the happiest, because the most sinless, years of his life. A light streamed from one of the windows, and he discerned by it that a female form was seated near a table, her head resting upon her hands, and a sheet of writing-paper spread out before her. Allan's heart beat quick, for though her countenance was averted from him, he recognized the air and form of his mother ; and in the attitude which she had assumed, he saw enough to satisfy him that to the peace of mind which had so long deserted himself, she too was a stranger. Allan did not pause to examine farther ; he lifted the latch gently, traversed the hall upon tip-toe, and opening the parlour-door, stood for a moment, as if rendered powerless by strong emotion. But it was only for a moment. His cloak was cast aside — one word — my mother ! — and she lay upon his bosom, breathing yet powerless, and insensible to all the outward forms and sounds of nature.

Some time elapsed ere Mrs. Mac Diarmid recovered from that trance. Not that she had fainted ; for the consciousness that her son's

arms supported her, never faded away ; but the flood of joy was too powerful to be resisted, and the faculties of motion and of speech were alike suspended. At length, however, she opened her eyes, and when they rested upon that countenance, which, scathed as it was, presented to her fond gaze the loveliest picture that God himself could produce, she closed them again, as if fearful that they had only deceived her. “Oh, Allan,” she muttered at last, “can I believe my senses? Speak to me! Is it thy very self?—My son, my son, art thou indeed restored to me?”

“It is even so, my mother,” replied Allan, kissing her affectionately ; “thine own Allan supports thee once more.”

“And thou wilt not leave me again?”

“Never—from this hour I will be thy protector. Much, much have I endured and done. Many crimes have I committed, many hardships have I undergone; but I am a changed man, my mother. I am now thine, and thine only.”

“Then God be praised!” cried she ; “all, all will be forgotten. In the blessings which we

now possess, the very remembrance of past sorrows are blotted out. And you will never leave me again?"

"No, mother, never. I have found no peace elsewhere. Like the dove sent forth from the ark, I have sought in vain for a resting-place abroad. I will seek it here; and here, beside my mother, I will find it. So look up and bless me as thou wert wont, for indeed, indeed, I stand sorely in need of thy blessing."

"It is thine, my son; a mother's fondest and best blessing rest upon thy head. And now tell me all that has befallen you,—how you have sped, where you have been, all that you have suffered. But you are faint and weary, and I indulge my own selfish joy while my darling is in want both of rest and food."

In a moment the domestics were made aware of the return of their young master, and little as he merited the feeling, there prevailed among them all the most cordial satisfaction at the event. One ran here, another there, in order to testify their zeal in his service, and a meal was speedily served up, of which, in spite of his mental sufferings, Allan had fared of late

too scantily not to partake in abundance. His greetings, moreover, were kind and affectionate towards them all. With the men he shook hands, the women he would have embraced, had their modesty permitted, while his mother sat by, no inapt model of the purest feelings of the heart fully gratified.

A meal eaten under the circumstances which then surrounded Allan, is for the most part a very brief operation. On the present occasion, it lasted only till the absolute wants of nature were supplied ; after which the remnants were removed, and Allan and his mother were left to renew their dialogue. It proved to be one of the deepest and most stirring interest to both. Allan, indeed, gave but a meagre account of his own fortunes ; for his anxiety to obtain information was too intense to permit his wasting time in communicating ; and Mrs. Mac Diarmid was in consequence overwhelmed with inquiries, some of which she experienced both difficulty and disinclination to answer. Nevertheless, Allan drew from her the substance of all that had taken place since the failure of his plot to carry off Marcella. He

learned with something of indignation, but more of surprise, that their secret had been betrayed—though how, or by whom, she was at a loss to guess; and finally the estrangement resulting from it, as well as the measures pursued by Ardmore with reference to his daughter's marriage, were narrated with the false colouring which prejudice gives. To all this he listened with a degree of anxiety, such as caused every word to pierce into his soul—and rendered the work of respiration laboured and difficult, by reason of his efforts to breathe silently.

“But is all this certain?” demanded he: “Are you sure that she entered into the project willingly? have you proof that she is a consenting party to the match?”

“Can you doubt it, Allan?” replied his mother. “Have I not watched their movements as the cat watches her prey? Have they ever turned in their seats without my knowing it? and is it probable that I should remain ignorant of the purpose which so many confidential visits were meant to serve? Rely upon it, that

she gives her hand to him freely—at least that she would have done so less than a fortnight ago."

"Then why is the negotiation interrupted? and why is that now demanded as a sacrifice, which was originally promised as a free and willing gift?"

"I cannot answer you there. Poor Elspeth is, you know, gathered to her fathers, and since her death, my sources of intelligence have been in a great measure cut off. But may not the whole thing be a trick? May not Ardmore have some new end of his own to serve, for the purpose of attaining which all this reluctance is feigned?"

"No, mother. Ardmore was never kind to me, and I owe him nothing; but whoever accuses him of selfishness in his dealings with the clan, lays that to his charge which he does not merit. I can scarcely believe, even on your assurance, that this strange contract was ever acceptable from the first; I am sure that now violence alone will compel its fulfilment."

"If I could think so, Allan, then would I

cheerfully lend all the aid in my power to press the matter forward ; I hate them so bitterly !”

“ Do not say so, mother. There is no ground for hatred. What injury have they ever done to us ? Marcella, indeed, will not be mine ; but have I any right to hate either her or her father for that ? No, no—I may lament it, mourn over it, go mad upon the thought of it ; but for them—I cannot, ought not to hate them ; nor may you.”

“ Then you do not feel as I feel, Allan. What would they expect ? are not you her equal in every respect ?”

“ No, mother, I am every way her inferior ; in mind, in morals, in character, in personal appearance—I am not worthy to be her slave. She is too bright, too pure, for me to gaze upon from a distance—it was an act of presumption unpardonable, ever to dream of love.”

“ You told me that you were a changed man, Allan, and I see that you are so. What then do you intend ?”

“ To save her, at all hazard, from a match which she abhors. To guide my whole conduct so as to merit and obtain her friendship. To resign myself from this hour to the discharge of those duties which I have too long neglected. This is what I intend; and you, my own beloved mother, must support and strengthen me in carrying these intentions into effect. How soon will this point come to issue ?”

“ To-morrow, it is expected, that the factor will carry the first of his threats into execution. Doolatre is then to be ejected, and a cousin of Duart’s established in his room. If this bring Ardmore to his senses, the persecution will end where it begins; if not, Ardmore himself, with all whom he values most, will be driven forth.”

“ The beast—the brute—the cur!—does he imagine that this will be endured? No, by Heaven! Let the miscreant attempt to disturb but one man, however humble, in the possession of his property, and he shall rue it to his dying day. To-morrow, said you?”

“ Yes, to-morrow. Our notices state, that to-morrow, about noon, the process will be served.”

“ And will he come in person to superintend the performance of the ceremony ?”

“ It is said so, and there are many reasons why we should credit the report.”

“ Thank God for that ! And now, mother, I am weary and ill at ease. I would fain sleep once more in the bed which I have so often pressed, when my heart was light, and my soul free from those cares that harrow it now. Let us part for the night. Give me your blessing again. It may perhaps avail, even for me, and the sound of your voice, as you pronounce it, falls sweeter upon my ears than music. We will talk of all this by-and-by. In the mean while, should I fail to join you at breakfast, do not fret at my absence. I am accustomed to rise early, and there are scenes both far and near which I long to visit ; and, as I wander on at times without greatly considering whither I may be carried, it is possible that we may not meet till evening.”

“ You do not mean to abandon me again, Allan? Better a thousand times you had not returned at all, than thus to tantalize me with a momentary glimpse of all that I love on earth.”

“ No, dear mother; I will not leave you,” replied Allan, affectionately; “ I gave you this promise before, and I repeat it. But where is Red Ranald ?”

“ Away to his more remote haunts, and an exile, I hope, for ever, from the strath. You do not wish to see him ?”

“ Perhaps I may—and yet I do not know—for he was but half trustworthy at the best; and now, perhaps, the less intercourse we maintain with him the better. Are you sure that he will not betray you in the event of his capture ?”

“ I cannot tell, nor is it a matter of the slightest importance. Our position has undergone a thorough change since the robbery; indeed the affairs to be transacted now are in themselves of so much greater importance, that it will doubtless be forgotten even by Duart.

But it is not worth while to seek out a man whom, on every account, we ought to wish anywhere rather than here."

" You may be right, mother ; and now, once more, good-night !"

Mrs. Mac Diarmid repeated, more solemnly than before, her benediction over her son ; a strange ceremony for persons to go through after playing the part which both the giver and the recipient had of late years acted. But the mere forms of religious observances are often kept up where the spirit of religion is unknown. Not at any period of her existence, perhaps, had Mrs. Mac Diarmid entertained one principle of vital religion ; Allan, though, like the devils, he believed and trembled, was totally ignorant of what the term meant. Yet now, when the lives of both had been stained by a series of glaring offences, the one found pleasure in giving, the other comfort in receiving, a formal blessing. So tenacious in its hold is superstition, and so immovable the prejudice which attaches to the benediction even of an impious parent the thought of benefit even to an impious child.

CHAPTER XIII.

THOUGH the sun had set in a cloudless sky, and the night continued, for a while, serene and beautiful, the morning that followed the conversation alluded to in the last chapter came in heavily, and with a degree of gloom which seemed to portend a storm ere the new day should close. Our readers are probably aware that the climate of the west of Scotland is particularly mild. It seldom happens that frosts are experienced in any keenness till Christmas has come and gone, and even then the snow and the ice, which usually go hand-in-hand with that merry season, are for the most part confined to the loftiest of the mountain ridges.

When we state, therefore, that the morning which succeeded Allan's arrival brought with it a lurid and cloudy appearance,—that the air was soft almost to enervation, and the atmosphere heavy and oppressive, those who are familiar with the features of a young November, as he shows himself beside the lochs and amid the sheltered valleys of Argyleshire, will perceive that we give no more than a common picture of that stage of the winter, in a district where winter is, comparatively speaking, little felt.

Gloomy as the appearance of outward nature was, it accorded well with the sentiments of those who from the hill-side, or the margin of the blue waters that skirt Mac Diarmid's country, looked abroad upon the face of heaven. There prevailed from one extremity of the strath to another but one feeling of utter despondency: old and young, the gentleman and the peasant, appeared equally aware that their fated hour was come; and acting as men generally do who believe themselves to be under the influence of destiny, they neither speculated on the probable means of averting their mis-

fortunes, nor murmured because they were inevitable. All business was, indeed, suspended. The women and children kept close within doors,—the men betook themselves, either singly or in little groups, to the most sequestered haunts amid the rocks,—indeed a stranger who traversed the country might have done so without meeting in all his course a single human being of whom to ask a question.

Full of anxiety respecting her son, and eager to ensure to herself the pleasure of his company, Mrs. Mac Diarmid, who had slept but little, rose early, and repaired at once to Allan's apartment. The door was ajar, and she entered, but Allan was not there. She looked to the bed. It bore traces of having been occupied, that is to say, the coverlid was indented with the impress of a human form; but the clothes had manifestly not been rolled down, and the bed itself was empty. Allan had adhered to his over-night resolution. Though the gray dawn was yet only struggling in the east, he had anticipated its arrival, and was now—his mother knew not where.

Disappointed, almost desponding, Mrs. Mac

Diarmid returned to the parlour, where, in a species of listless indolence, several hours were spent,—hours which at Ardmore were marked by the working of many stormy passions in the breasts of more than one of its inmates. Fergus, as he looked back upon the result of the meeting of the previous day, felt his heart sink within him, for though his kinsmen had failed to press the demand, in consequence of the strange interruption to which they had been subject, he knew them too well not to be aware that for any calamities that might overtake them he would be blamed. When he reflected, moreover, how little was now to be gained even by the sacrifice of his daughter, and recalled to mind the anguish under which she had recently groaned, he could not but acknowledge that let the result be what it might, the course which he had adopted was the proper one. Parson Neil, again, though far from repenting the step which he had advised, could not wholly divest himself of the uncomfortable conviction, that things had not turned out in all respects as he had intended. He would have blamed Ardmore for precipitation, had he not observed

how oppressive were the cares of that individual already ; and he therefore was content to reproach himself, because he had omitted to warn his friend of the necessity which existed to exercise, in his dealings with Duart, the very extreme of caution. As to devising any means of averting, even for a brief season, the storm that threatened, he felt that to be impracticable. Like Fergus, therefore, his fretting and self-upbraiding led to no other result than a confession that they must prepare to receive, as they best might, whatever calamity an offended Providence might choose to bring upon them.

In this manner the day wore on, each successive hour adding both to the gloomy aspect of the heavens, and to the deep and silent dejection which oppressed men's minds from one extremity of the strath to another. Even Marcella was not free from the profound anxiety which agitated all by whom she was surrounded ; and though too thankful for the escape which she had herself made to look upon other matters in the light which, perhaps, really attached to them, both her fears on her father's

account, and her grief as she contemplated the approaching ruin of her race, became next to insupportable. Neither sorrow nor anxiety, however, have, over the flight of time, a control more absolute than their opposites. Nine, ten, eleven o'clock came, without producing the slightest change either at home or abroad. Not a living creature betook himself to his customary employments. The fishing-cobbles lay idle in the bay; the shepherds had forsaken the hill-side, and even the loiterer might no longer be seen gazing from his accustomed perch among the rocks. The spirit of desolation seemed, indeed, to have overshadowed the district, for the very cattle browsed lazily and far apart, and the sheep were gone where no eye could follow them.

Such was the condition of Strath Diarmid when, soon after twelve, and amid the increasing gloom of a gathering storm, a small pinnace was observed to round a promontory nearly opposite to Glenarroch, and to direct its course towards a rude pier that projected into the loch hard by. It contained, in addition to the crew, five individuals, of whom the family at

Ardmore were enabled, by the aid of a glass, to recognize two. These were Duart and Mr. Playfause,—on what object bent it would have been perfectly useless to inquire; the remaining three were strangers, though of these, two bore the air and general stamp of menials. Ardmore groaned heavily as he resigned his telescope to Parson Neil. “Then the die is cast with a vengeance,” said he, “and nothing remains for us but to bare our bosoms to the stroke, from which no man on whom it falls may hope to recover.”

Ardmore’s powers of vision had not deceived him. Smarting under the sense of a twofold injury, and degraded even in his own eyes, Duart had with difficulty constrained himself so as to permit the expiration of the week which he had granted as one of deliberation. He did so, however, under the fixed persuasion that Fergus would prove immovable in his resolves; indeed the state of his mind was now such, that had it been possible to arrive at a different conclusion, the circumstance would have occasioned to him any thing rather than pleasurable sensations. For his attachment to

Marcelly, if a passion such as his deserve the name, was converted into deadly hate. Had she been offered to him now freely, and without hire, he would have spurned her from him; indeed his sole motive for desiring that the offer should be made, was that he might find an opportunity of mortifying both her and her father by a rejection. A thirst of vengeance was, in truth, the single master-passion under which he acted. Even avarice had lost its influence, else would he have pounced upon his victim at once, because he knew that in destroying utterly a sept which his master abhorred, he would earn a rich recompense to himself. But he preferred the gratification of malice even to the amassing of treasure, and bent all his thoughts to consider how most fully to indulge it.

There were two modes of proceeding, by either of which he could bring ruin on the tribe which he abhorred. He needed but to call in the aid of the offended laws, by laying a formal information of the robbery before the Lord Justiciary,— and the temper of the times sufficiently assured him that the business was

done. Even if lives were spared, and that was far from being certain, an order to levy fines would immediately issue, and in ten days the strath would be bared of every gentleman that answered to the name of Mac Diarmid. But though complete, as far as it went, this method of avenging himself came not up to the refinement in cruelty of which a mind like his was capable. No: as the Indian seeks to prolong the sufferings of his captive, after he has fastened him to the deadly stake, so Duart gave the reins to his ingenuity, for the purpose of devising some process, by means of which he might gorge himself, as it were, upon the misery of the Mac Diarmids. They should perish by slow degrees. Hope should be kept alive in the bosoms of individuals only that its extinction might be the more keenly felt, and, one after another, they would fall under blows from which they had severally flattered themselves that they were safe. Nor was this all. Duart had many needy kinsmen, for whom it was desirable to provide. These he determined to settle on the farms, as, one after another, they fell in; and thus, ere the gene-

ral crash came, the survivors of the race of Diarmid would have been witnesses to the expulsion of their kindred, and the occupation of their own farms by men whom they had been taught from infancy to regard as enemies.

Big with these determinations, and gloating over the pictures of misery which his hellish imagination conjured up, Duart quitted his home on the morning previous to the day which was to witness his first exertion of arbitrary power. For the transference of Doolatre to a kinsman of his own, so soon as the present occupant should have outrun his hour of grace, he had already made arrangements. There needed, indeed, but the formal execution of a distress in order to accomplish that important purpose; and to render that legal, the presence of the sheriff's substitute was absolutely necessary. Duart, therefore, quitted his home, and repaired to Fort William, where Mr. Playfause's business lay, and whither he had directed his needy cousin, a weaver from Glasgow, to hasten. He found them true to their trystes, and, having speat an evening

of disgusting debauchery, during the pauses of which his plans were arranged, he slept that night the honoured guest of a knave as heartless as himself.

“ Well, Peter,” said Duart to the Writer, as his own place being secured in the stern-sheets of the boat, he invited his companions to make themselves comfortable; “ I think we shall make short work of these limmers to-day. The law is on our side famously, and, like experienced soldiers, we can push our approaches free from every thing approaching to risk or annoyance.”

“ No doubt of that, Duart,” replied the man of parchment, spreading a plaid so as to render his seat commodious, at the same time that it enabled him to wrap up snugly in the event of a shower. “ We have the law with us throughout, and one parchment-scroll is worth a hundred broadswords now-a-days, thanks to the Duke and his loyal followers. You have been very merciful to these catarans; I confess that I think you have been too much so.”

“ Not a whit, not a whit, Writer. One

pities the delusions of mistaken men, and it is but a Christian's part to bear with them. But patience may certainly be worn out, and I don't mean to deny that the case is so in the present instance. Yet I do regret the ruin of an ancient family. I am of an old family myself, and it goes to my heart to break down a house almost as honourable as my own."

" That is vera humane in you, Duart, vera merciful indeed. But, after a' your poleetical differences, there's an unco kindly feeling among you gentlemen o' auld families, notwithstanding. What think ye, Maister Archibald ?"

" Troth, I kenna what ye call auld families," replied the cousin to whom the appeal was made ; " and I dar say, we're as auld as Macullamore himself. But my father ne'er blasted muckle about his family. He was an honest butcher in the Gorballs, and his brother, Duart's father there, used to rin errands for him. I mind your father weel, Duart,—a vera honest——"

" I don't doubt it, cousin," interrupted Duart ; " but what think ye of the state of the

sky? I am muckle afraid that a storm is brewing. I don't like the scud of the clouds at all."

It seemed as if the boatmen entertained the same opinions, for the canvass, which had been originally spread at large to catch the light air that blew, was gathered in. But neither Duart nor his boat's crew proved skilful prognosticators of the weather. The wind, instead of rising, fell, till there came an absolute calm. Nevertheless, the waves, as if acted upon by some power superior to that of ordinary nature, rose to a prodigious height, and rolled on, tipped at intervals with a coat of foam. A sort of wild moaning noise, moreover, came down the corries, and swept across the bosom of the loch, while the echo catching it up, sent back a reverberation not unlike to a furious and unnatural peal of laughter. Under such circumstances the Factor's barge held its course. The sails flapping uselessly against the mast, the crew were compelled to make way by rowing, which, in consequence of the prodigious swell, proved an exceedingly unpleasant task; and hence some hours were

expended in crossing an arm of the sea, which, in ordinary cases, a well-manned boat might cross in less than one hour and a quarter.

Noon was considerably passed when, fatigued, agitated, and, to a certain degree, labouring under the influence of a superstitious apprehension, the crew drove the bow of the boat against the pier. There was no difficulty in securing it there; but the swell was such that Duart, in his attempt to reach the land, fell backwards, and narrowly escaped immersion in the water. He disembarked notwithstanding, and being followed by the Writer, his cousin, and two attendants, he walked forward, in the first instance, towards Glenarroch. He had no horses: he was determined that the clan should feel how completely they were at his mercy. He chose to make a requisition on this obnoxious branch of it for his own and his attendants' means of conveyance. He therefore, after sending forward one of his gillies to explain his wants, proceeded leisurely in the direction of the avenue, and reached the gate without meeting by the way with any

circumstances calculated to excite either suspicion or alarm.

Any demand coming from an acknowledged agent of the reigning family would have been received at Glenarroc with extreme distaste ; in the present instance, the order to supply Duart and his attendants with horses was listened to with marked impatience, and many an anxious eye was turned in various directions with the hope of finding in Allan a ready leader in the opposition which all were prepared to offer. But Allan came not. He was gone, no one knew where, and numbers who were ready to dare every thing, if required by an acknowledged leader, remained sullen, but inactive, because the mind to direct was wanting. Horses were accordingly furnished, though with undisguised reluctance ; and Duart and his party being met not far from the landing-place, mounted, and set forward in order.

The weather, which had been lowering from the moment when they launched the pinnace, now darkened around them to a degree absolutely appalling. Dense black clouds col-

lected over the face of the sky, and though the grass was motionless, there came down through the refts in the mountains a wailing sound, well calculated to strike with alarm the minds even of the bravest. The sea, moreover, though tossed by no tempest, rose every moment more and more formidably, while long and heavy waves threw themselves against the shore, and broke up in volumes of scattered and frothy foam. The Writer and his immediate *protégé*, Mr. Mac Alpine of the Gorballs, looked fearfully around them. “ I tell you what,” said the latter, pressing his horse close to that of Duart, “ I don’t half like this business. Nature seems to have set her face against our proceeding—at least, to-day. Let us go back, for surely no good will come of it.”

Duart heard him, and the working of his imagination was every way in accordance with the sentiments of his relative. He, not less than the speaker, had been powerfully affected by what he saw and heard, and, in spite of all that he could do to the contrary, the superstitious prejudices peculiar to his age and

country gained, if not an absolute mastery, at least a strong influence over him. Nevertheless, there was a passion at work within not less engrossing than superstition. He had been duped where he expected to dupe others: he had been detected in a matter where his vanity was deeply concerned. These were wrongs which he knew not how to forgive; and, had it been made clear to him that revenge was to be obtained only by some extravagant personal sacrifice, he would have made it without a murmur, provided only the end were gained. Though, therefore, the Writer joined with his relative, and though there was a secret monitor within which repeatedly cautioned him to act on the hints they gave, he refused to be guided by their counsels, and, affecting a bravery to which in reality he was a stranger, he insisted on pressing on.

The little cavalcade pursued their progress in profound silence. They looked round, but not a living soul was to be seen, either on the road, or along the sides of the hills, or beside the margin of the water. It was a scene of total desolation, to which the absolute stillness

of the air added not a little of force : indeed, their own voices, though never raised above a whisper, sounded loud and inharmonious in the ears of the speakers. Once or twice Duart paused, as if irresolute ; but, after a brief interval, he on each occasion recovered himself. “ Forward ! forward ! ” at length he cried aloud ; “ this day sets the matter at rest for ever. It is but to conquer at first, and all that follows is easy.” He said this, apparently to the Writer, who rode close to his side, though the tone in which it was uttered was sufficiently audible to be heard at least fifty paces beyond the speaker.

They had now traversed the greater portion of the space which intervened between Glenarroch and Ardmore, and were approaching a bend in the road, at the extremity of which uprose that eminence of which we have already spoken, as the Fairy Knowe. It was a peculiarly romantic spot, for a little stream, or burn, brawling downwards at the base of the hillock, swept its clear current across the road, and a grove of beautiful wych-elms overshadowed the natural terraces which connected the

road with the precipitous mountain. “Thank God!” said Duart, as, after passing from beneath the shade of these trees, he emerged once more upon the open track: “I did not quite relish that sombre pass: but we are safe now, at all events,—thank God!”

He had completed the sentence but a moment, and his relative, to whom he addressed himself, still leaned towards him, when the report of a single musket was heard. There was no time to look around—thought itself could not work, ere the effect of that shot became apparent. Duart sprang upwards from his saddle, and, without uttering a cry or a groan, fell prostrate to the earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

STUPIFIED with horror, and uncertain how far their own fate might be involved in his, Duart's attendants possessed no power to move, either for the purpose of rendering assistance to their fallen companion, or of instituting a search after the assassin. Involuntarily, indeed, their eyes turned upwards to the spot whence a wreath of smoke ascended, and they saw, or fancied that they saw, the figure of a tall man, muffled in a cloak, pass rapidly among the trees. But of following the fugitive, no one appeared to entertain an idea, and the man was in consequence permitted to escape unrecognized. Nay, Duart himself lay where he had fallen, unnoticed, at

least by his kinsman. One hurried glance, and only one that individual threw towards him ; when suddenly wheeling his horse, he struck his heels violently into the animal's flanks, and set off at a gallop. The Writer, with his official, immediately followed the example, and all, except a poor menial, left the factor to his fate.

While his betters thus looked to their own safety, by retiring with as little delay as possible to the boat, Duart's servant approached his master — whom he found pierced through the back with two bullets, and bleeding profusely. The man saw, to use a favourite phrase of the old romances, that 'there was no need of a surgeon ;' but the respect which his countrymen in general entertain for the mortal remains even of a stranger, induced him to drag the body out of the road, and lay it decently, with the face downwards, under a tree. This done, he set off in the direction of Ardmore, for the purpose of communicating to its inmates intelligence of the foul deed, and obtaining assistance in the removal of the slain to some better place of shelter. But though he

used the utmost expedition, he found, on his arrival at Ardmore, that the information, of which he believed himself to be the bearer, had preceded him. The utmost horror indeed, not unmixed with alarm, prevailed; and amid the confusion incident to such a state of things, the commonest dictates of prudence seemed to be neglected.

Shrewd and keen-sighted, as well as strongly tinctured with the passion of revenge, which is said to flourish nowhere in greater vigour than in the Highlands of Scotland, the man kept all his eyes and ears about him, and became, while an accidental inmate of Ardmore, witness to many transactions, of which he carefully treasured up the recollection against the day of inquiry, which he foresaw must come. In particular, he observed that a tall man, fearfully seamed with the small pox, was there—and he heard that person allude in very remarkable terms to the recent atrocity. It appeared, indeed, as if the conversation, of which he overheard only a part, had been going on for some time, inasmuch as the few sentences that reached him, related manifestly to discussions which had gone before.

“ I enter into your feelings,” said Ardmore, apparently in reply to some observation on the part of the stranger, “ and highly approve of your intended resolution. I regret, however, that the means at my disposal should fall short of your wants ; but to five Jacobuses, I make you heartily welcome ; and should any accident detain you so long, I will endeavour to transmit to the proper quarter, a further supply three days hence. It is an unfortunate business for us all ; but in your case, there is but one course to be pursued.”

The man accepted the proffered money, took up a cloak which he had cast aside, and withdrew—leaving a horrible impression upon the mind of one out of the many who observed him, that he was not now seen in that garb for the first time.

The truth is, that within less than half an hour from the fall of Duart, the family at Ardmore, who were in momentary expectation of his arrival, found their retirement abruptly broken in upon by the individual whom, above all others, they least desired to see. Allan Breck burst unexpectedly into the room where

they were sitting. Though not usually given to betray in the working of his countenance the passion either of surprise or alarm, it was easy to perceive that he had been drawn thither by some extraordinary impulse. There was a slight flush upon his cheek, his eye wavered, and once or twice he passed his hand across his brow, ere he succeeded in overcoming a certain inexplicable agitation, which it was manifestly his desire to conceal. All this, however, occupied less of time in its occurrence than we have consumed in describing it; when he abruptly demanded whether they knew what had befallen?—A common exclamation, expressive of ignorance, was the answer.

“Then I have to inform you,” continued he, “that Duart is dead.”

“Dead!” cried the little party in amazement and horror. “Where?—how?—when?”

“At the foot of the Fairy Knowe, within these three quarters of an hour, he has ceased to live. Some one has shot him, with an aim fatally correct.”

“God have mercy!” exclaimed Fergus: “who can have done this deed?”

“ That I know not,” answered Allan, “ but of the fact you may rest assured; and it remains for you to decide upon the steps which you esteem necessary to take. As far as I am concerned, the sooner I quit the country the better. A strict search will of course be instituted after the murderer, and where that goes on I must not remain. The assassin may escape, but the deserter from the Elector’s army is sure to be found, and his life, in that case, is not worth an hour’s purchase.”

Fergus and Parson Neil could only stare at one another in mute dismay, which Marcellly seeing, hastily quitted the room, scarcely more shocked at the nature of the intelligence than eager to avoid the presence of him who conveyed it.

The discussions naturally arising out of the information just given were in progress, when Duart’s servant made his appearahce. He came but to confirm a tale of which the family were already informed, and perhaps at any other moment would have been treated with neglect, if not with harshness. But a sense of danger is, under all circumstances, apt to render

men condescending to those around them and hence the menial of one, whom but an hour ago the family regarded as their deadliest foe, was received with marked hospitality. The consequence was, that opportunities were afforded him, of which he failed not to take advantage. He heard Allan allude again to his projected flight, and speak of the peculiar hardship of his case, deficient as he was in funds adequate to carry him even to the coast; and he saw Fergus, after replying in the terms already quoted, put a purse into his hands. All these occurrences the man noted with a careful eye, and, as the event proved, made haste to describe them where he surmised that the information would be acceptable.

To order out his people for the purpose of removing the body of Duart to a place of shelter, and to despatch a messenger to the nearest town, with an account of what had happened, were proceedings which prudence, as well as a sense of duty, compelled Fergus immediately to adopt. It was a great point with him, at least to soften, if he could not absolutely avert the anger of the Government, which he was well aware

would, according to immemorial custom, involve the innocent in one common ruin with the guilty. He therefore scrupled not to display the full amount of that interest which he really took in the accident, hoping that by such means a favourable impression might be produced, and himself at least freed from suspicion. Yet it cannot be denied that a dark suspicion did cross his mind, that even as an individual he might find trouble from the accident ; for he knew the kind of estimation in which the chief authorities held him, and doubted not their willingness to crush him whenever a convenient opportunity should occur. It was, therefore, under a strange mixture of feeling, of alarm, horror, anxiety and hope, that he busied himself as we have just represented, adding this testimony to his abhorrence of the foul transaction, that of his own accord he offered a reward for the discovery of the culprit. Nevertheless, the lapse of four-and-twenty hours sufficed to convince him, that his plans were as futile as the end which he sought to attain by them lay far beyond his reach.

Allan Breck, after a brief interview with his

mother, had carried his threat into execution, and fled. He quitted the country on the very night of the murder, leaving no trace of the route which he designed to follow; nor were there wanting persons who harboured something more than a vague suspicion that his flight was not wholly attributable to the cause which he himself assigned for it. Be this, however, as it may, Allan was gone, and those whom he left behind were in doubt and suspense, when towards evening on the day succeeding the murder—the corpse lying as yet unclaimed in a cottage near the spot where it fell—a formidable body of troops entered Strath Diarmid. They were headed by the Deputy Sheriff of the county, and brought with them printed proclamations, which required the people, on pain of military execution, to give up, within a limited time, the assassin to justice. That, however, was not the only nor the most important object of the expedition. The troops marched upon Ardmore, drew up in such order as to prevent the possibility of ingress or egress, and, at a given signal, grounded their arms. Immediately the

Deputy Sheriff, attended by the commanding officer and an escort, entered the house, and Fergus, by virtue of a warrant, to which the signature of Argyle was attached, found himself a prisoner.

At the period of which we are now writing, to treat with common delicacy, far less with generosity, a person situated as Fergus Mac Diarmid was, would have been to incur the displeasure of a Government not yet entirely recovered from the alarm with which the rebellion of 1745 had affected it. So at least the authorities seemed to think by whom the privacy of Ardmore was violated; for neither the entreaties of the father, nor the profound distress of the daughter, had upon them the smallest effect. Fergus was not so much as permitted to bestow a parting benediction on his child, but being dragged forcibly from her presence, was committed to the keeping of a guard, and marched off, without a moment's delay, to Inverary. Nor was greater regard paid to the unhappy situation of Marcella, deprived, as it so chanced, even of such support as Parson Neil might have afforded her. She,

as well as the domestics, were told to consider themselves prisoners—an announcement to which the planting of a sentry at the door of a room into which they were indiscriminately thrust, served to give additional effect; while every drawer and crevice throughout the house was ransacked for papers, all of which were sealed up and removed. Nor did the outrage end here. The search being completed, first Marcellly, and then the servants, were conducted one by one into the presence of the civil officer, by whom they underwent a long and harsh examination on the subject of Fergus's general behaviour throughout the period when his intercourse with Duart was most frequent. How her companions in trouble might have answered it was of course impossible for Marcellly to tell; but her own replies were, as the truth required, absolutely devoid of meaning; yet she saw, not without a shudder, that they were carefully noted down and set aside, for what purpose it was scarcely possible to doubt.

By such means as these were the spirits of Marcellly kept from sinking under the shock which the sudden arrest of her father had oc-

casioned ; for it is certain that excitement, even though of a painful nature, is the best palliative that can be applied to sudden calamity. The very horrors of that night kept her, indeed, from brooding over misfortunes as yet in the distance ; and hence the possible result of her arrest, rendered, doubtless, terrible from the degree of mystery in which the whole affair was as yet involved, failed to affect her as it otherwise would ; for with her dismissal from the presence of the examining functionary, her trials by no means came to an end. Even in the seclusion of her own apartment she escaped not the contamination of being an involuntary earwitness to the rude revelry of the soldiers, who, taught to regard themselves as at free quarters in an enemy's country, put no restraint upon their humours. No wonder, then, that her apprehensions should have become hour by hour more purely selfish, inasmuch as she knew herself to be without a protector, and she could not tell to what lengths the brutality of such men might carry them.

It was considerably past midnight, and the sounds of revelry and tumult were heard no

more, when Marcella, who had not ventured to lie down, became sensible of a strong smell, as of burning timber. She paid to it, for a while, no attention, but the smell becoming more and more oppressive every moment, her fears began by degrees to take a new direction. She rose from her seat, and, forgetful of the horrors which had recently filled her mind, endeavoured to pass out into the lobby. To her unspeakable dismay she found that her chamber-door was fastened on the outside ; and hence that, whatever emergency might arise, all means of egress were cut off, for the window, to which she involuntarily ran, offered no channel of escape. It was a casement, set in an iron frame, of which a very small portion opened at the centre, while its elevation from the ground, at the very top of the house, would, of itself, have rendered the descent perilous in the extreme. Marcella clasped her hands in agony, for the gradual accumulation of smoke in the chamber had already confirmed her worst apprehensions. The house was on fire,—and unless Providence should especially interfere to prevent it, she must perish amid the flames.

In arriving at this conclusion Marcella had not deceived herself. Long before the debauch came to a close, the house had caught fire, and ere a consciousness of danger succeeded in rousing its inmates, a considerable portion of the lower story was in a blaze. Then, indeed, there arose a tumult, to convey any correct notion of which language were inadequate. Stupified, some with liquor, others with fear, the soldiers ran one against another, all eager to escape from the fury of the conflagration, and all equally indifferent as to the fate of others. Meanwhile their shouts and cries mingling with the roar of the conflagration, produced a din which might have awakened the dead, and which effectually prevented even such as were sober and collected from looking far beyond their own individual cases. The consequence was that the building was soon emptied of its inmates, few among whom, however, thought it necessary to carry aught along with them, or endeavoured by the slightest exertion to oppose the progress of the flames.

While the soldiers stood in groups idly gazing upon the ruin which they had wrought,

Marcella beheld, with what feelings the imagination may best depict, the rapid approaches of a death more horrible to contemplate than perhaps any other to which in civilized life men are liable. She heard the increasing roar of the flames,—she experienced the growing pressure of the atmosphere,—she saw the smoke eddying in in sable folds through the chamber,—and withal came the conviction that escape was impossible. In vain she endeavoured, by elevating her voice, to be heard above the tumult that prevailed. As well might the lark raise his note amid a thunder-storm, or the mariner pipe his whistle amid the hurricane. Her cries were drowned by the noises which seemed to herald her coming destiny, and, despairing of succour, she ceased, for a brief space, to utter them. But the instinct which urges all animals to struggle hard for life is not apt, even at the worst, to lie dormant, in either young men or young women. Having again, and with as little effect as formerly, tried the door, Marcella sprang upon a stool, and thrusting her arm from the casement, waved a white handkerchief as a signal of distress.

“ By heavens, there is some one in that chamber !” exclaimed a voice.

“ It is Miss Marcelly, it is Miss Marcelly !” cried another, which she instantly recognized as that of her nurse ; “ save her, for God’s sake save her !”

“ Make way there !” cried the first speaker ; “ Be she who she may, she shall not perish if I can help it.”

Marcelly heard no more : the increasing density of the vapour, not less than the conviction that she had thrown her last card, caused her breathing to come with difficulty, and she fell back in a state of stupor on the floor.

When consciousness returned, Marcelly found herself lying on the earthen floor of an out-house, her head supported on the lap of Christian, and a group of persons, whose countenances were for the most part strange to her, standing near. They were all busied in paying to her the most delicate attentions ; yet there was one among them whose anxiety appeared more lively than that of the rest, and who no sooner beheld her eyes open and her colour return, than he expressed his satisfaction in

glowing terms. Marcella turned towards the speaker, and beheld a young man of very prepossessing appearance, over whose garments it was not difficult to discover that fire had recently passed. One of his hands, moreover, seemed to be powerless, apparently from the effects of a recent injury, and there was an animation in his manner, and a sparkle in his eye, which told her at once that she beheld her deliverer. She raised herself to a sitting posture, and would have spoken, had not one of the young officer's comrades prevented her.

“ Now then, Middleton,” said this person, “ you see that she lives, be persuaded to have your hurts looked to : there are no injuries so hard to cure as those occasioned by fire ; and the night air may bring on God knows what consequences.”

“ Never mind me,” was the answer ; “ make her your first care, doctor ; I shall apply to you for help by and by.”

But he who was last addressed would not listen to the proposition ; and Middleton was at length compelled to submit himself to the

discipline which the surgeon of the regiment saw fit to order.

The remainder of the night passed by without the occurrence of any other event worthy of repetition. Marcella, who had been rescued at the imminent hazard of a brave man's life, experienced no lasting or serious inconvenience from her fright, and felt too thankful for the escape which she had made, to permit the minor considerations of immediate discomfort to affect her. On the return of daylight, however, she solicited and obtained permission to remove to a cottage in the strath ; where, under a sort of parole of honour that she would not quit the country without leave, she was permitted to reside. But the spectacles that met her from day to day were not such as she could endure to look upon. A relentless soldiery let loose upon an unresisting people committed excesses, of which, to describe the least, were to offend the delicacy of the reader ; and even Marcella herself more than once narrowly escaped the degradation to which almost all around her were subjected.

In the midst of these distresses she derived her chief support from the kindness of Parson Neil, who, having been absent at the moment when Fergus suffered arrest, found himself by some fortunate chance exempt from the captivity which had overtaken his patron. Unknown to her, too, she had a protector among the soldiers themselves ; namely, the same English officer who had rescued her from the flames, and who, though he never obtruded himself upon her privacy, watched over her with the assiduity of a brother. So anxious, indeed, was he that she should suffer no inconvenience, that, except once to satisfy his apprehensions on her account, he never presented himself at her new abode ; and if they occasionally met elsewhere it was impossible to attribute the circumstance to any other cause than pure accident. Nor was this all. His manner never varied from the first, being uniformly modest, respectful, and delicate, such as a nice sense of honour is apt to call forth, particularly in the intercourse which a brave man maintains with the unfortunate. Nevertheless the situation of Marcellly became day

by day more grievous to be borne. From her father she received no communication, her repeated entreaties to be admitted to his presence were rejected, and the restraint which had been wantonly put upon her own personal liberty was not without much useless delay removed. At last, however, intimation was given that she might dispose of herself as she saw best,—and she gladly took advantage of it, to remove, with her faithful tutor, to the vicinity of that pile within which Fergus lay immured.

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE these things were in progress elsewhere, Fergus lay a lonely captive in the prison at Inverary,—a rude and massive pile, which the improvements of modern times have long ago swept away. His treatment there was, for a while, of the harshest and most oppressive description. Rigidly cooped up within a narrow cell, and cut off from all communication even with his legal advisers, the sole intercourse which he maintained with his fellow men, consisted in the few and common-place salutations that passed between him and the gaoler ; varied, indeed, at remote intervals, by inquisitorial visits from the agents of the

parties at whose suit the intended prosecution was about to be conducted. It was to no purpose that he entered, through such unfriendly channels, repeated protests against this illegal restraint. His applications to be allowed the benefit of counsel were, by a rare distortion of authority, rejected ; and even his entreaties that, at least, his daughter might be permitted to visit him, failed to receive attention. It seemed, indeed, as if the hereditary enemies of his house were determined to crush him at all hazards ; and the persuasion that the case was so, sunk like iron into his soul.

Such was the order of things, as far as related to Fergus, during several weeks, which, on the part of Parson Neil, were spent in strenuous endeavours to secure for his friend that assistance which the urgency of his case required. Having settled Marcella in her humble lodging, under the care of a family in whose honour he could confide, the Parson set out for the metropolis, where he made every exertion to interest in favour of the prisoner such advocates as, from the bent of their political principles, as well as by reason of their

known talents, were most likely to fight a desperate battle with spirit and success. But here again it soon appeared, that the superior resources and craft of the enemy had prevented him. There was not a barrister of name whom the opposite parties had not, to a certain degree, retained ; while the few of inferior reputation that still stood unfettered, had all, by false representations of the case, conceived a strong prejudice against it. Nevertheless, the perseverance of Neil Macpherson was not to be overcome in the conduct of any matter which he once took in hand. He continued his exertions with indefatigable zeal, and was in the end rewarded by obtaining not only the assistance of able professional men, but an order from the Lord Justice Clerk of free admission, both for them and his private friends, to the prisoner's place of confinement.

We pass over, without minute description, the few events that befell between the reception of that order which gave to Marcellly access to her father's presence, and the eventful day which was to decide whether Fergus should return to society with a reputation untarnished,

or die the death of a malefactor. Enough is done when we state, that amid numerous causes of dejection and sorrow, the renewal of that intercourse which had so long been cut off, was felt, both by the captive and his child, as a blessing unspeakable, and that she became almost as constant an inmate of the prison as himself. On her part, too, there ceased not to exist throughout a firm persuasion that all would yet be well, and that the distresses of the moment would supply them in after years only with topics of interesting conversation. Not on any occasion, therefore, did her grief partake, even remotely, of the character of despair, while her manner became day by day more cheerful, and her conversation more easy. The case was widely different as respected Fergus himself. He knew, that if there was one object more than another which the head of the Clan Campbell desired, it was an opportunity to break up for ever the consistency of a rival sept; and he could not doubt, that the chance which Fortune had in the present instance thrown in his way, would be urged to the utmost. While, therefore, to his daughter

he affected to speak lightly of his own danger, he was at heart deeply impressed with its extent ; for his knowledge of what had been done already, left him no room to doubt, that every engine would be brought to bear for the purpose of securing against him a verdict of guilty.

At last the day of trial came, and the prisoner, escorted by a guard of soldiers, was led from his dungeon to the hall, already filled by a crowd of anxious spectators. On the bench before him sat the deadliest enemy of his race, the hereditary Lord Justice-General of Scotland, supported by the Lord Justice Clerk, and another Judge, while, of the fifteen men whom the jury-box contained, not fewer than eleven had been selected from the dependents of Macullamore. Had this occurred in England, it would have been easy for the party arraigned to challenge, without reserve, all of whose impartiality he might entertain a suspicion. But the law of Scotland gives no such privilege to the unfortunate accused. Fergus, therefore, perceived at a glance, that the odds were fearfully against him, while the hints which his counsel had dropped relative to the

witnesses about to be examined by the prosecutor, had no tendency to render his fears less lively. Still he put a bold face upon the matter, and answering with an unfaltering voice, that “ He was not guilty of the murder with which he was charged,” the trial began.

It may, perhaps, be necessary to inform some of our southern readers, that the forms of the Scottish criminal law confer upon the advocate of the panel, or prisoner, the somewhat anomalous privilege of entering, immediately after the indictment and criminal letters have been read, on his client’s defence. This, as well as the replies of the Crown lawyers, compose what are called the pleadings to the relevancy, during which, the arguments in point of law, and evidence in point of fact, are fully gone into on both sides of the question. On the present occasion Fergus’s counsel dwelt at much length upon the hardships which his client had undergone, particularly in the exclusion from professional advice and assistance to which he had been in so extraordinary a manner condemned. He proceeded next to dilate upon the extreme improbability, that a gentleman circumstanced

as Ardmore was, could possibly embark in an affair so unprofitable, not to say so criminally base, as that in which he was asserted to be a prime mover. He pointed out, that his client and the deceased had for many years been on a friendly and familiar footing ; that, through the partiality of Duart, Ardmore had been enabled to discharge what he believed to be a solemn duty to his kinsmen, while, at the same time, the demands of the Government were regularly and fully met. He hinted, that it could be shown in evidence, that ties more intimate than those of mere neighbourhood were about to be formed between the parties, and that nothing but an accident, of which the effects would have been in due time removed, hindered that design from being carried into execution. He explained, that Allan Breck Mac Diarmid, the party asserted to have been suborned, returned from France only the evening preceding that day on which the assassination took place ; and he challenged his opponents to show, that so much as five minutes of private conversation had even passed between him and the prisoner at the bar. “ And upon

what grounds," continued he, "is it, that my client is charged with so atrocious a crime? My Lords, I find but one act performed by the gentleman who stands in that dock, that can, by any perversion of human language, be pronounced to savour even of imprudence. After the murder had been committed, his kinsman, Allan Breck,—notoriously a deserter from the Royal army, and as such liable, in case of capture, to suffer death,—explained to him the peculiar circumstances in which he stood, and besought an advance of money to aid him in effecting his escape to France. My Lords, politically speaking, a compliance with this demand was doubtless an offence of a grave nature; but I put it to yourselves, whether, believing a near relative to have incurred no heavier moral guilt than this, there is one among you who would have hesitated to do as my client did, and so enabled your kinsman to escape."

"I protest, sir," interrupted the Lord Justice-General, "against such reasoning as this. You seem to forget, that rebellion is the parent of almost every other offence of which

man can be guilty, and that he who favours the escape of a rebel and a traitor, is answerable for all the crimes of the criminal whom he favours. There is no honest man, far less a judge, who would act as your insinuations imply."

"Be it so, my Lord," replied the counsellor ; "yet I suspect it would be a hard matter to say how often the Lords of Argyle have taken up arms against their sovereigns, and hence that, if your Lordship's line of argument be correct, by how many blots the arms of that noble house are stained. But let that pass. I merely wished to observe, that the single act of indiscretion with which I allow my client to be chargeable, is one of which many honourable and upright individuals have been guilty, but which ought not, in your Lordships' minds, nor in those of the gentlemen of the jury, to connect him in any way with the horrid deed which Allan Breck is presumed to have perpetrated. But, my Lords, this is not all. My client, if connected with this murder at all, which I will defy my learned friend the Lord Advocate to prove,—can be treated only as an accessory

before the fact ; and I humbly submit that no accusation can lie against an accessory till the principal shall have first of all been found guilty. Observe, my Lords, that I hold this line of argument strictly as a point of duty on my own responsibility, because my client is not only willing, but anxious, to have his character fully cleared by a verdict from fifteen of his upright countrymen. Nevertheless, I am bound to contend, that till Allan Breck be first of all put upon his trial, you cannot, in accordance with the tenor of Scottish law, call upon one who is not the principal in the outrage, to clear himself :—Primo, because, if the contrary practice were allowed, probation might be led against the principal, though absent, contrary to the fundamental law of this nation ; and it must first be proven he, the principal, committed the crime—*primo debet constare de corpore delicti*, before the accessory can be convicted. 2^{do}. If the accessory must defend the absent principal, it may be of the most fatal consequence to both, though innocent. The principal's greatest enemies may be led as witnesses ; and such defences as would have been sufficient to exculpate him entirely, may be omitted.

3^{to}. These principles are followed by the opinions of all lawyers who write upon the criminal law, and likewise by the practice of neighbouring nations, particularly of England, where the principal must be attainted after verdict or confession, before any judgment can be given against the accessory. But, 4^{to}. What I now plead I humbly apprehend to be the law of Scotland; for so it is expressly said, Reg. Mag. chap. 26, B. 4; as well as chap. 83 and 29 stat. David II.; and agreeable to these is the opinion of our great criminal lawyer Sir George Mackenzie, laid down in the strongest terms in his title Avt. Pavt. par. 9. 5^{to}. I must object for the panel to the relevancy of this libel, that the facts and circumstances mentioned in it, though they should be fully proven, are not sufficient to infer his being accessory to this murder. Every libel is a syllogism; the major proposition contains the crime, and the laws against that crime; the minor contains the facts charged against the panel; and the conclusion is, that from these facts he is guilty of the crime, and deserves to suffer the pains of law. Now if the facts charged do not amount to the crime, the conclusion must be false, and

the charge irrelevant. This, I humbly apprehend, is the present case. From the above narration of the facts, and what observations I have already made upon them, I hope your Lordships will be of opinion that the circumstances charged in the libel are so extremely vague and trivial, that they are not sufficient to bring the panel under so much as suspicion of the horrid crime laid to his charge."

The young man who stood thus boldly forward in support not more of his client than of the laws, was listened to with respectful silence ; but if we except Marcellly and Parson Neil, who occupied a retired place in the court, he carried with him the sympathies of few indeed, out of a numerous and deeply prejudiced auditory. A similar result attended the pleading of his second, save that on more than one occasion the Lord Justice-General considered it not derogatory to the dignity of the bench to interrupt and browbeat him ; but when the crown lawyers began to speak, judges, jury-men, and spectators alike appeared to drink in each word and sentence that fell from them. By these the inferences which it had been attempt-

ed to draw from the rigid imprisonment to which the panel had been subjected were vigorously resisted. It was shown that in point of fact no real hardship was sustained, inasmuch as the ingenuity of the defence left little room to doubt that talent of the highest order had been actually engaged on the side of the accused. “And when we come to facts, my Lord, what do we find? My learned brother has said, that there is absolutely nothing, except the accidental advance of money to the fugitive, Allan Breck, which can in any way connect his client with the foul deed of which the said Allan is allowed to have been guilty. If your Lordships will attend to me, I think I can make it sufficiently plain, that not one, but a thousand circumstances, most of them far from minute, render this case as clear as any that ever came under the cognizance of a legal tribunal. In the first place,” and here the learned counsel entered into a detail of Fergus’s life, more particular, and more substantially correct than the prisoner had believed it possible for him to give. The cautious policy of the Laird of Ardmore,—his unremitting zeal in the Jaco-

bite cause,—the steps which he had taken to ameliorate the condition of his clan, and to support his chief in respectability abroad,—all these facts were stated with as much precision as if the hero of the tale had opened his bosom to a confessor, and that confessor had betrayed him. Nor did the unexpected narrative end here. The judges were made acquainted with the tenor of that intercourse which had well-nigh brought about a union between Marcellly and the deceased. “ Nevertheless,” continued the speaker, “ all this proved to be but a continuation of that system of deceit and chicanery for which, from his very boyhood, the panel has been renowned. Would you believe it, my Lords,—the prisoner at the bar not only never entertained the idea of fulfilling the pledges which he gave, but adopted the basest and most atrocious means in order to falsify his own plighted troth? Probably you have heard of a daring robbery committed upon a Government courier while on his progress from this place to the residence of the deceased Duart. I do not hesitate to charge the prisoner with having devised and effected that scheme, and I shall be

able to prove that this flagrant step formed but a link in the great chain which has at last terminated in this most foul and unnatural murder."

It will easily be imagined that a declaration so peremptory, involving a point where he knew himself to be open to attack, affected the prisoner very deeply. Involuntarily he started, nor was it without a strong effort that he restrained himself from giving utterance to certain expressions of horror and surprise which rose almost to his lips. But the exertion, though painful to the last degree, was made effectually, and he regained a mastery over himself so complete, as that he could pay a close and accurate attention to the statements that followed ; and these were, to say the truth, if sometimes vague and disjointed, abundantly ingenious. The pleader asserted that he was prepared with witnesses to prove, that from the day of that robbery the panel had become an altered man, even in his language. He had uttered frequent and unguarded threats, all of them implying that if the deceased should presume to act in obedience to the laws, he would find ample reason to repent his rashness. On

the occasion, moreover, when the deceased came to Ardmore for the purpose of investigating the robbery, the panel had behaved to him with so much violence and insult, as to cause a precipitate abandonment of the design. But these facts, though furnishing strong grounds of presumption, were feeble indeed, when contrasted with other matters to which he would call their Lordships' attention. He was prepared to show that not even the entreaties and remonstrances of the tacksmen themselves availed to bring the panel to reason. "And why not, my Lords? Because he was aware that a ready instrument of violence was at hand; and he preferred seeking a release from engagements into which he had entered through the blood of his victim, to any honourable and just terms of reconciliation that could be offered. My Lords, this Allan Breck arrives, no one knows from whence, the very evening preceding that day when it became the duty of the Government factor to eject certain defaulters from their lands. The first point to which he makes is Ardmore, and there, in the presence of a whole concourse of witnesses, he throws out

threats which the panel, though in his own house, not only fails to reprove, but is well known to have encouraged. And what follows? The unfortunate deceased is basely assassinated,—not a hand or foot is moved for the purpose of arresting the murderer; nay, the body is permitted to lie disregarded where it fell many hours, while the panel turns all his attention to matters of a widely different import. That very day he sees Allan Breck, approves of his determination to flee the country, and actually supplies him with money sufficient to defray his expenses to the coast.

“ So much,” continued the counsel, “ for matters of fact; and now for the question which my learned brother has raised, touching the legality of proceedings against an accessory, while the principal is at large, or *non inventus*. My Lords, it is not true, that Allan Breck is charged in this libel as the principal, and Fergus Mac Diarmid as accessory, to the murder of the deceased Duart. They are both charged in the same words, with being guilty art and part of the said heinous crime; and though it be true, that in the subsumption or recital of

the facts it is said, that the actual murder, or firing upon the deceased, was committed by Allan Breck; it is also said, that this was done in revenge of the quarrel which this panel took up against the deceased, and in pursuance of a concert or conspiracy betwixt the panel and Allan Breck to take away the life of Duart; and such being the case, they are in reality both principals. By the law itself (l. 15, *ad legem Corneliam de sicariis*) ‘*mandator cædis pro homicida habetur*;’ and the learned Mathius *de criminibus*, in his prolegomena saith, ‘*Qui mandant scelus quique mandatum exequuntur, utrique rei sunt, et ordinariæ quidem pœnæ subjugandi*;’ and for proof of this, brings many arguments and authorities, and inter alia, ‘*cum quis alicui mandat scelus, mandantem quidem caput esse; mandatorium vero manum et instrumentum mandantis. Hinc sacro, quoque, oraculo cædes Uriæ Davidi impingitur*;’ namely at 2nd Sam. xii. 9, in which text the words of Nathan to David are, Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword.”

Such was the strain of argument pursued by the counsel for the crown, and such the grounds

on which the judges determined that “the objections to the libel ought to be repelled, and that the libel was relevant to infer the pains of law.” It was in consequence decreed that “time and place libelled, the deceased Alister Mac Alpine of Duart was murdered ; and that the panel, Fergus Mac Diarmid, was guilty actor, or art and part thereof; but that the panel should be allowed to prove all facts and circumstances that might tend to exculpate him—and be remitted, with the libel as found relevant, to the knowledge of an assize.”

CHAPTER XVI.

MINUTE as to an English reader the preceding details may appear, a Scotchman will at once perceive that they describe in meagre outline only the preliminary arrangements to every criminal trial which takes place north of the Tweed. There the judges discharge, in some measure, duties which devolve in England on the Grand Jury; that is to say, with them rests the authority of determining, whether or not the case shall go before a petty jury at all—only that, instead of examining evidence, they hear counsel on both sides, and are guided in their decision as to the rejection or finding of the bill, by the superior plausibility of one speaker

or the other. Then follows the impanelling of the jury, the adduction of whatever written testimony may seem to bear on either view of the case, and the examination *viva voce* of as many witnesses as each party may have considered it necessary to cite. Finally, the Crown Lawyer, after summing up, addresses the jury for sentence of a condemnation, and is answered by the prisoner's counsel, who makes as strong an appeal as circumstances will allow, both to their feelings and consciences, for an acquittal. How far these proceedings may be more conducive to the ends of strict justice, than the more barren system of the south, it is not our province to determine; but it will, we think, be admitted on all hands, that to the accused at least, they offer advantages such as he does not possess either in England or elsewhere.

On the present occasion, every thing went on according to the established usages of the country. The jury being impanelled and sworn, Fergus was again called upon to plead, and again in a clear and audible tone, pronounced the words "Not guilty." A variety of documents were next put in, consisting of the

answers which he had himself made to the interrogatories of the committing magistrate, and such papers and letters, among those taken possession of by the troops, as seemed in any way to bear upon the point under trial. Then followed the oral examination of a whole string of witnesses, who, one by one, were introduced into court, from the apartment within which the jealousy of the Scottish law had kept them imured from the commencement of the proceedings. These were chiefly occupiers of land in Strath Diarmid, with a few of Ardmore's domestic servants, who spoke to sundry loose threats and angry expressions which their master had from time to time thrown out in their hearing ; and who likewise bore testimony to the sudden termination of a treaty of marriage, into which they had been given to understand that Fergus had entered with the deceased. Still nothing transpired calculated to affect with the slightest alarm either Fergus or his agents ; who, on the contrary, breathed more and more freely, as each fresh witness, after stating all that he knew, was dismissed from the box.

Thus stood the trial, when the Lord Advo-

cate, turning towards the bench, said, “My Lords, the evidence which we have hitherto brought forward is meant only to satisfy the minds of the jury, as to the nature of the panel’s feelings towards his victim. I am now going to call one who, unless my instructions grossly deceive me, will be able to bring the charge of murder home to him—as completely as any charge can be brought home, which depends entirely on circumstantial or secondary evidence. I must request the proper officer to introduce Ranald Vichian Roy—otherwise called Red Ranald of the bloody hand.”

Fergus, who had listened to the learned Lord’s declaration with apparent indifference, changed colour as soon as the name of Red Ranald was mentioned, and could with difficulty command himself when that well-known individual took his place in the witness-box. He gasped for breath, and, turning his eyes full upon the countenance of the savage, strove, as it were, to overawe, or, failing that, to work upon his better feelings. But it was easy to discover that he had not succeeded in either design. Ranald returned the stare, while a

smile of deadly rancour, not unmixed with triumph, curled his lip ; and then looking doggedly towards the counsel who stood ready to examine him, prepared to act his part unmoved in the eventful drama. Nevertheless, he had not answered the first leading question ere a visible change occurred in his bearing also. There was a slight pressure at the farther extremity of the court, and Ranald, with the wariness which belongs peculiarly to the character of an outlaw, cast a hasty glance thither. His countenance instantly fell, and, as if he had recognized there some object which he little expected to see, his replies became vague, confused, and unsatisfactory, even to the Judge.

“ You are not brought here to criminate yourself, Ranald,” observed the examining lawyer ; “ for you know, that on condition of a candid and frank confession your pardon is secured. You will, therefore, state freely, and without reserve, all that you know respecting the robbery of the courier, and the subsequent disposal of his despatch-bag.”

“ She kens unco little anent it,” was the sullen reply.

“ That is to say, she is not very willing to speak against herself; but she need not be under any personal apprehension. She has only to say by whom she was herself employed to do that deed, and into what hands she committed her booty.”

“ She kens naething about it,” was still the answer.

“ What! Ranald,” demanded the lawyer, “ cannot you tell us under whose orders you acted?”

“ She taks nae orders frae naebody.”

“ Well, well, whom did you oblige on that occasion?—at whose suggestion was it done, and what followed afterwards?”

“ She did it to oblige her mother.”

“ Your mother, fool! what had your mother to say to that affair?”

“ She disna weel ken.”

“ Dolt! idiot!—but it will be the worse for yourself,” muttered the overmatched lawyer. However, recovering his habitual self-control, he endeavoured to carry forward a fresh attack by varying his ground a little.”

“ Come, now, Ranald, let us have no riddles

here, but say at once, whither you went with the letter-bag, and into whose hand you gave it."

" She doesna just mind."

" But you were seen to go into the woods about Ardmore,—and you have yourself stated already——"

" My Lords," interrupted the prisoner's counsel, " I must entirely object to my learned brother's mode of examination. It is quite clear that his witness knows nothing, and it is altogether unfair, that a fictitious memory should be created by the eloquence of the learned advocate. I must——"

" Sir," observed the Lord Justice-General, " it is doubtless your duty to throw every possible impediment in the way of justice; but it is ours to see that the dignity of the laws be upheld, and the blood of an innocent man atoned for. The learned advocate is not out of order, and may, therefore, proceed as he has begun."

A violent altercation ensued upon this, during which Ranald again threw a furtive glance round the hall, the effect of which seemed to

be a removal of that extraordinary embarrassment under which, at the commencement of his examination, he was seen to labour. When, therefore, the crown lawyer renewed his interrogatories,—more cautiously, perhaps, but scarcely with greater regard to delicacy,—Ranald answered freely, though, for a time, his replies could hardly be said to throw any light upon the subject. He admitted that he had entered the woods of Ardmore; that he was met there by a man, into whose hands he gave the mail-bag; and that he did so at the express desire of his mother. But he denied all knowledge of the person of the individual, nor could either remonstrances or half-expressed threats induce him to vary his tone. It was left, therefore, to be collected as an inference, rather than explicitly shown, that Fergus had taken a part in the robbery; though, to say the truth, that inference rested on grounds too conspicuous to escape the observation of a certainly not over-friendly jury.

Trusting to the effect thus produced, the counsel for the prosecution went on to interrogate the witness respecting his knowledge of

the bloody tragedy, on which it was the object of the present proceedings to throw light. Ranald was asked whether he knew Allan Mac Diarmid, commonly called Allan Breck Mac Diarmid ? He answered, that he had known him from his birth.

“ When did he last see him ?”

“ On the 16th of November ; that is to say, on the day succeeding that when the murder was committed.”

“ Where did he see Allan Breck on the occasion referred to ?”

“ He met him in a wild part of the country, about twenty miles from the spot where Duart died.”

“ Did any particular conversation pass between them on that occasion ?”

“ Yes. Allan Breck informed him that Duart had been shot, and that he himself was on his way to the coast, fearful lest, in the search which would be made after the murderer, he might be recognized as a deserter, and apprehended.”

“ Was any thing farther stated ?”

“ Allan Breck then said, that Duart de-

served his fate, and that the country was well rid of him ; that a keen eye and a steady hand fired the shot,—for it was a kittle place to take aim from, and few could have done it so accurately ; that the deceased sprang from his saddle when the ball hit him, as he had seen a maukin bound when well peppered ; and that he spoke but two words after.”

“ Well, and what more passed between ye ?”

“ I askit at him, who had done the deed ? and he answered, that mair nor ane was concerned in it ; but that he houped nae harm would come to onybody on account of the death of a scoundrel factor. Aboon a’, he trusted that Ardmore wad keep his ain counsel ; for if he did that, naething could touch him.”

A murmur ran through the court at this announcement, while the advocate, addressing himself to the jury, begged that they would pay particular attention to the matter. “ But this is not all, gentlemen. I have laid before you one link ; now observe what follows, and say, whether my chain of evidence be not complete. You said, Ranald,” continued he, turning towards the witness, “ that Allan expressed

his belief that Ardmore could come into trouble only through his own inadvertence. What did you understand him to mean by this?"

" My Lords," again interrupted Fergus's counsel, " I submit to your Lordships whether such a question can be put and answered?"

A second altercation ensued, which, however, as the event proved, might have been spared ; for Ranald, on the question being repeated in more guarded terms, declined to answer it. " He didna just see how he could satisfy the gentleman. He understood naething but what gaed on afore him ; but he was ready and willing to state all that, gin their honours liked." The Lord Advocate was in consequence compelled to go forward with his examination, from which the following facts transpired.

Allan Breck made Ranald acquainted with the amount of pecuniary assistance which he had received from Ardmore. He appeared, however, but half satisfied with it, and murmured much as he hinted at certain wrongs of a different nature, of which he had reason to complain. Being questioned more closely as to the murder itself, he stated, that the shot

was fired from behind a certain old oak, amid the long rank grass, near the root of which the instrument used by the assassin would be found. Finally, he repeated his expression of hope, that Ardmore would act cautiously, so as to hinder any suspicion from attaching to himself, and departed. All this, it will readily be imagined, made an impression upon the jury. Yet strong as that evidence was, Ranald had yet stronger and more startling facts to adduce. He stated, that being curious to ascertain how much of truth there really was in Allan's assertions, he went to the old oak described, and looked narrowly among the brushwood and grass for the gun. There, sure enough, he found an old-fashioned Spanish piece, which, when once seen, could scarcely fail to be remembered; and it was now, he presumed, in the possession of the Sheriff's officer, to whom, when arrested himself, he had delivered it.

As Ranald proceeded in his declarations, the interest which pervaded all classes of persons within the hall became every moment more and more intense. The jury listened with gaping mouths and ears, the prisoner and his counsel

watched every syllable as it fell, like men who are conscious that their difficulties increase upon them, and the very spectators seemed to have the rest of their senses absorbed in that of hearing. A pin dropped upon the floor would have been audible, while the Sheriff's officer, in obedience to an order from the bench, proceeded to unfold a roll of cloth in which the musket had been enclosed. It was at length produced and laid upon the table. Fergus groaned audibly,—a wild and hysterick shriek burst from a remote corner of the hall, and there arose instantly a stirring and tumult, such as occurs in crowded places when some serious accident has taken place. “Carry her out! carry her out! the air will recover her.” These and similar exclamations gave notice that a female had fainted; and Marcella was immediately removed, insensible, to her lodgings.

As soon as order had been in some degree restored, the proceedings were renewed; but they possessed little of interest, and still less that demands repetition. The gun was distinctly sworn to as the property of Fergus of Ardmore, nor did he, when questioned on the

subject, deny the fact. But his solemn asseverations that he had not seen the weapon for months, and that, to the best of his belief, it had lain concealed in an out-house ever since the arms of the clan had been given up, made no impression on the court. Even the indifferent portion of the auditory—if, indeed, there was an indifferent person present—received these declarations with distrust; and he himself utterly despaired of the issue. “It is all over with me,” whispered he to his counsel; “they are determined to have my life, and they will have it.” The lawyer only shook his head, though, like a skilful general, he prepared to bring his last reserve into play ere he gave up the contest in despair.

The proof adduced against Ardmore being entirely circumstantial, it was of course impossible to weaken it, except by calling witnesses who could speak to the general character of the panel on the score of humanity and general kindness of disposition. This was done with as much diligence as circumstances would allow; but the parties examined being almost all kinsmen or relatives, their testimony, had it been

given more boldly than it was, would have availed little. When, therefore, the Lord Advocate proceeded to address the jury, he spoke with the air and collectedness of one who knows that his case is in itself a strong one, and that those who are about to consider it will at least abstain from wantonly trying its consistency. He went carefully over the ground which he had trodden in his introductory harangue, so as to bring in, from stage to stage, the declarations of the several witnesses, and, with the aid of a few forced constructions, he made up a story, of which the most impartial auditor could not deny, that at least it hung well together. In particular he dwelt upon the absence of all imaginable motive such as could lead Allan Breck into the commission of so gratuitous a crime ; and then referring to the facts that the instrument by which Duart perished belonged to Fergus, and that from him came the pecuniary resources which enabled the avowed assassin to escape, he put it to the jury, as men of sense and reflection, to say whether they could conscientiously acquit the panel. Nor was the conversation between the fugitive and

Red Ranald kept out of view. On the contrary, it was drawn out into a narrative well calculated to work upon the minds of men disposed, from various causes, to regard the accused with distaste, and ready, should necessity require, to put both justice and law into the background.

Heavy and cumbrous was the load with which Fergus's counsel felt his energies borne down, when, in accordance with the humane statute which provides "that in all criminal pursuits, the defender or his advocate be always the last speaker," he rose to rebut the assertions and combat the inferences of his learned brother. Not all his eloquence, and he possessed much, could carry the court along with him, while giving to the details brought out in evidence a favourable cast ; and when, at the conclusion of this section of his labours, he was proceeding to offer certain remarks of his own, the very men on whose fiat the life of a fellow-creature depended, showed symptoms of disapprobation. "Pray, sir, cut short," exclaimed one of the Jury, "we have had enough of it, and are quite tired ;" nor was it till after a great deal of discreditable controversy had taken

place that he was permitted to resume. We need not pursue the narrative farther. Repeatedly browbeaten by the Justice-General, and impatiently heard by the jurors, the advocate still fought his client's battle nobly, and wound up all by a powerful appeal to the feelings, as well as to the honour and probity of such as heard him. But the appeal was made in vain. Even the recommendation of one of the Judges to withhold their verdict till the morrow, was rejected, and the Jury, after remaining but an hour in their apartment, gave in, by the hands of their chancellor, a verdict of guilty. The usual proceedings immediately followed. The court, after a brief consultation, caused the sentence to be written in the fatal book, which was signed by the whole of the Judges, and then read aloud, according to established usage, by the doomster. It "discerned and adjudged, that Fergus Mac Diarmid be carried back to the prison of Inverary, there to remain till a certain day,—that he then be delivered over first to one functionary and afterwards to another, and that, last of all, he be conveyed to a gibbet to be erected on the road side

of Loch Garroch, in a conspicuous place, where the murder was committed ; that upon Wednesday, the —— day of ——, according to the present style, betwixt the hours of twelve at noon, and two in the afternoon, he be hanged by the neck upon the said gibbet by the hands of an executioner until he be dead ; and thereafter be hung in chains upon the said gibbet. And it ordained that all his moveable goods and gear be escheat, and in-brought to his Majesty's use. “ Which,” continued the reader, in an elevated tone, “ is pronounced for doom.”

CHAPTER XVII.

AMONG all who listened to that tremendous sentence, and to the harsh and unfeeling address with which the Justice-General followed it up, there was not perhaps an individual on whom it appeared to produce a less deadening effect than upon Fergus himself. He looked up with perfect composure, and in a tone which faltered not, and with a cheek that underwent no variation in its colour, declared his perfect innocence of the crime for which he was condemned to die. But both the court and the jury heard him with the same callousness which they had displayed throughout. It appeared, indeed, that the brief space of time

which he consumed in speaking, was esteemed, at least by the latter, as misapplied ; for his address was as yet unfinished, when they began tumultuously to collect into knots. Nor was the feeling elsewhere more favourable towards him. The judge hastened to pronounce the *sederunt ended* ; the crowd broke with noise and jostling into the streets, and the condemned man was led back amid a shouting and a careless throng to his cell.

In the mean while, Marcella, whom the cool air had restored to a state of consciousness, was conveyed to her lodgings, where her affectionate tutor endeavoured, by a thousand delicate attentions, to inspire her, if not with hope, at least with resignation. As yet, however, the language of consolation fell unheeded upon her ear. Not for a moment had she given admission to the idea that her father's situation was one of hazard, because she did not imagine that the utmost ingenuity of his enemies would be able, in any way to connect him with the crime of which he was accused. But the events of the trial, operating as occurrences wholly un-

looked for usually do, caused a complete revulsion in her feelings, and at once overthrew the fabric which a sanguine imagination had reared. Red Ranald's testimony, supported as it was by the production of the gun, came upon her with the force of conviction ; not indeed that her father was guilty—for of that she entertained not a suspicion—but that his doom was fixed. To the well-intentioned insinuations of the Parson, therefore, she listened with avowed incredulity, not unmixed with the quietude and irritability which are apt to cast their spell over a mind weakened by the infliction of some sudden and unexpected calamity.

“ Why mock me with words of comfort which mean nothing ?” said she ; “ you know, as well as I, that they thirst for his blood, and that the question of guilt or innocence is to them of little moment. They only wanted the formality of a trial to skreen their tyranny from the world, and they have got it. My father is murdered.”

“ I hope not, I hope not,” replied Parson Neil ; “ vindictive as they are, they cannot take

away the life of an innocent person, on the unsupported testimony of an outlaw. Some of the jury are men of character."

"Of character!" interrupted she, "ay, of such character as has ever belonged to a Campbell—cruel, grasping, remorseless and cowardly. Will they permit a Mac Diarmid to escape when once they have him in the toils?"

"But all the jurymen are not Campbells," answered Parson Neil, "and if they were, it becomes not us to condemn indiscriminately any portion of our fellow-men. Even in Macullamore's family there are doubtless some who respect the obligation of an oath, and would shrink from the shedding of innocent blood. Besides, Marcella, remember that we are in the hands of Him who knows best what is for our good—and to his will, however severe the trial may be at the moment, it is our duty to submit."

"Oh not now, not now!" cried the agonized girl, wringing her hands; "to-morrow, or next day, I may listen to you, but do not seek to reason with me now. My father! my poor father!"

It was thus that the remainder of that tedious day was spent, till the rush of the crowd along the street warned both Parson Neil and his pupil that the trial was at end. The wretched pair heard the tumult, and perfectly comprehended its meaning ; yet they shrank alike from a movement which must either dispel their hideous apprehensions at once, or destroy whatever of hope still lingered in their minds. They could only gaze one upon the other in mute dismay ; for the Parson experienced a strong disinclination to leave her, even though he could not but acknowledge, that almost any thing would be preferable to the suspense under which she laboured. But that which delicacy would not permit him to effect, the eagerness of the landlady to be the bearer even of afflicting intelligence, accomplished.

“ Ohon, ohon !” cried she, abruptly entering the room, “ ye’ve a dule darg to dree, young lady, and wae am I for ye ; wae, wae, that another should be added to the lang list of orphans that thae weary times hae made.”

“ What do you mean ?” exclaimed Marcellly ;

“in mercy speak out. Is he found guilty? is he condemned? will my father suffer?”

“Deed wul he, my dear,” replied the landlady; “they hae found him guilty, and condemned him too; but to hang him in chains—oh, that was cruel indeed!”

“I will go to my father,” cried Marcella, rising and assuming her cloak and bonnet, “I *will* see him instantly. I *must* see him, I *must* talk to him; I must receive from his own lips the announcement that I am shortly to be an orphan; and I *must* learn from his example to bend my head under the power which presses us to the earth.”

Parson Neil made no effort to combat this determination, for he saw that it would be useless; but he prevailed upon her to wait till an order of admission should be procured—and set out instantly for the purpose of applying in the proper quarter for the only favour which was likely to be granted to him. Though the customary hour of locking up was at hand, the petition of a daughter was not rejected, and Marcella and Parson Neil were admitted the same night to the condemned cell. We willingly draw a veil over the scene that occurred

there. Let it suffice to state, that both father and child derived something like strength from an hour spent in such exercises as best became persons in their melancholy situation.

We have taken occasion, while describing the trial of Fergus Mac Diarmid, to point out that facilities of defence are afforded by the Scottish criminal law to accused parties, of which the law of England knows nothing. A similar strain of humanity characterizes the Scottish proceedings after condemnation, when not eight-and-forty hours, but a term usually of weeks, is granted even to the convicted murderer to prepare for his fate. How far there is any real mercy in this, may, perhaps, be questioned, if we look only to the situation of the dying man ; but by the friends and relatives that melancholy interval is for the most valued beyond all price, more especially when, as in the present instance, the blow falls upon persons by whom it had not been anticipated. Then is there need of all those helps to resignation, which mutual converse can alone afford, while time is given, even in a worldly point of view, to adjust affairs which are seldom, in such circumstances, free

from embarrassment. Nor, perhaps, was this space between life and death ever more sedulously improved than on the present occasion. Marcella spent every day, from the hour of unbaring to that of locking up, in her father's cell, and finding him supported and firm, she too learned to contemplate the issue with something like fortitude. She received his instructions as to her future proceedings, and consented to place herself under the protection of his relatives at Caldham, to whom he had written as soon as his fate was determined, and who cheerfully undertook to afford her an asylum. But all his entreaties failed to induce her to quit him. "No, sir," said she, "I have strength enough to attend you even to the scaffold; but I have not strength to withdraw myself from your society, while yet I may possess it."

Thus passed the time till the fatal day drew near which was fixed for the removal of Fergus to the spot where it was designed that he should suffer. With a pardonable duplicity, Marcella had been kept in ignorance as to the exact period of the execution, and still believed that it was remote, when a single revolution of the

earth on its axis would bring it round. Nor did the increased solemnity with which Fergus blessed her on the evening previous to his departure remove the film from her eyes. She saw, indeed, that he was more than ordinarily affected as he spoke to her of her coming destitution, and she felt that his limbs shook as he held her to his breast, and imprinted a parting kiss upon her cheek. But hoping that they were to meet on the morrow, she attributed his increased agitation to bodily suffering, and strove, by an affectation of calmness, to lessen, if she could not remove it.

“ You will not lose sight of her, Neil,” said Fergus solemnly to the Parson ; “ you will continue to be her protector and guardian when I am gone ; and, for her sake, you will see that my character is vindicated from a charge which you know to be unfounded.”

“ She shall ever be to me as a daughter,” replied the Parson, with difficulty commanding his feelings ; “ go where she may, I will accompany her, at least till she find another and an abler protector ; one more devoted or true she will never find.”

“ And my reputation ?”

“ That, too, be assured, shall be vindicated, let the endeavour to do so cost what it may.”

“ Then farewell, my child,” exclaimed the father, once more encircling her in his arms ; “ may the conviction that he died innocent support you under the slights which a cold world will probably put upon the daughter of one who perished by the hand of the executioner !— and may He who is the father of the fatherless raise up for you friends when I am no longer permitted to watch over you !”

“ But we will meet again to-morrow, sir,” said Marcella, affecting a gaiety which she did not feel.

“ It were better not,” answered Fergus ; “ there are matters to be adjusted between me and certain of our kinsmen, which require that you should not be present. Our kind friend here will attend me, but you, my love, let me request of you, as a particular favour, that you stir not beyond your lodgings to-morrow. I do not know how soon I may send for you, so remain within doors, that even a moment be not lost in searching for you.”

Marcellly readily gave the promise, because altogether unsuspicous of its object, and retired to sleep soundly, in the firm assurance that their parting was not yet for ever.

It was profoundly dark, on a cold morning in February, when the noise of bolts withdrawn and chains rattling one against another, dispelled the light doze into which Fergus had recently fallen, and warned him to make ready for the last act which he should be called upon to play in the busy drama of life. He sprang from his pallet at the first alarm, and having lain down in his clothes, stood ready to bid the gaoler welcome, or to follow whithersoever his guards might lead. Nor was he kept long in suspense. There came a sound of heavy steps along the narrow passage that led to his cell,—the massy key revolved in its socket, and a couple of men, one bearing a lantern, the other manacles for his wrists, stood before him.

“ I houp ye hae rested weel,” said the elder of the two, as he advanced to do his office ; “ thae darbies will no’ hurt you,—they’re weel lined wi’ oo, and I took care to choose them roomy enough.”

Fergus held out his wrists immediately, and thanked the fellow for his attention, expressing himself at the same time perfectly satisfied with the treatment which he had received.

“I’m glad ye hae been comfortable,” said the man, a rough but not a heartless savage; “it’s aye our endeavour to treat gentlemen in trouble like gentlemen, and bena whan our orders are particular, to gie them a’ the liberty we can. I couldna help the thrall ye was in when ye first cam; it wasna my doings ava; but ever since they afforded mair freedom, I’ve done my best to see you righted.”

“I know you have, Duncan,” answered Fergus, “and I wish it were in my power to offer you a better recompense than thanks: but these sad times have left me little else than thanks to offer to any one.”

“I want nae mair frae your honour,” answered the gaoler, “unless it be that ye will just forgive ony neglect or awkwardness that ye may have suffered here. Mine’s no’ a pleasant office, sir.”

“No, Duncan, nor are you hard-hearted

enough for it. But I have nothing to forgive, and therefore, God bless you!"

"The same to your honour. Tak care o' him, Hemish ; hand the light down that he may see."

Thus spoke, in a tone rarely heard within the walls of a prison, one who had filled the situation of gaoler at Inverness many years, but in whom even the duties of that office could not deaden the feelings which Nature has implanted in every breast. Nor was his associate less attentive. Fergus was conducted, with the greatest tenderness, to the outer gate, where stood a cart with three or four armed men round it, ready to convey him to Strath Diarmid ; and long ere the sun rose he was considerably advanced on a journey with which he well knew would end his toils and trials for ever.

Beside him, on a cushion composed of straw overlaid with a blanket, sat Parson Neil, his friend and companion during many eventful years, and now his spiritual comforter at the last. Their conversation was not, however, very animated, for men, circumstanced as Fer-

gus then was, seldom experience much inclination to talk ; indeed there passed little between them, after the prisoner had satisfied himself touching the condition of Marcella, till long after the sun had risen. But as old and familiar objects crowded more and more upon their sight, the associations which they were calculated to stir up began to exert themselves.

“ This is a bitter cup, Neil,” observed Fergus, “ and a hard matter it is to drink it. Had they done their will in a strange country, I think that I could have borne it without a murmur ; but to bring me to a place where every rock and tree is familiar, surely there is the very wantonness of cruelty in that. It is a terrible thing to die.”

“ To the guilty, doubtless,” replied the Parson ; “ but to those whose consciences acquit them of crime, even in such an hour as this there is light breaking through the darkness.”

“ No doubt, no doubt,” replied Fergus, speaking hurriedly, “ it were a thousand times worse to feel that one’s fate was merited. But in any case, Neil, be assured that life is sweet,

and the prospect of death—and by suffocation too—it is appalling to the boldest."

" Yet it is that to which we must all come," replied the Parson ; " and were your hour deferred, God alone, in whose hand the events of time repose, can tell whether you might not be less prepared to meet it."

" And my poor child !" continued Fergus : " Oh, Neil, you know not how that tie binds the heart to earth,— how strongly that image stands between a parent and his hopes even of Heaven."

" Remember, my dear friend, who it is that has promised to take the widow and the orphan under his especial care ; and place so much reliance upon me as to believe, that she shall never, while these arms can toil, or this tongue beg for her, know what it is to suffer want."

" I believe you, Neil ; and, trust me, I do place my reliance on that Rock of which you make mention. Yet it is hard to die, and die innocent, all through the duplicity—"

" Do not reproach any one, my dear patron," exclaimed the Parson, " but forgive freely, as you hope to be forgiven. If you have suffered

wrong, be assured that the circumstance will not pass unheeded where you have too frequently done wrong ; but let not your lips condemn, nor your heart nourish rancour, at such a moment as this."

" God forbid ! God forbid !" cried Fergus ; " I forgive them all, judges, jury, witnesses,—ay, and Allan too ! But the prospect is terrible—I know not how to regard it !"

They were by this time arrived at a little inn, or house of entertainment, on the margin of an arm of the sea, which separated the southern frontier of what was called Mac Diarmid's country from the rest of ——shire. There the escort halted, partly for the purpose of refreshing themselves, partly with the view of ascertaining whether the preparations on the opposite shore were complete ; and Fergus was, in consequence, compelled to alight, and to exhibit himself manacled to the gaze of persons who had often seen him under widely different circumstances. It appeared, however, that both his arrival and the peculiar state that attended him, were anticipated. He was received with the greatest delicacy and kindness :

indeed, except that a sentinel kept his place in the room, and the shackles still confined his wrists, it would have been impossible for him to tell that he was a prisoner. But the purposes, to attain which the halt had been ordered, were speedily effected. The breakfast was as yet incomplete, when the arrival of a body of troops at the opposite side of the ferry warned the leader of Fergus's escort that he was expected ; and the meal being hurried over, the whole party embarked. In a few moments they were ferried across, when, the prisoner being handed over to the proper officers, his hitherto humane and considerate keepers took leave of him.

The remainder of the journey being performed on foot, and in the centre of a band of mercenary soldiers, Fergus had little leisure to indulge the working of his feelings by conversing familiarly with his chaplain. As they advanced, moreover, spectacles more and more harassing met them at every step. Each shieling as they passed it, poured out its women and children, to rend the air with their wild cries of indignation and sorrow, while, along the sides of the hills, groups of men might be

seen hanging, like thunder-clouds, over the vale below. Fergus beheld these sights and listened to these sounds with the deepest emotion. Yet he knew that they boded no good to him ; for the troops marched in order, with muskets loaded, so as to obviate all chances of a rescue. Nor, to say the truth, did he entertain the slightest wish that an attempt so desperate should be hazarded ; for even now the fear of death overcame not the prudence of the politician, which satisfied him of the utter hopelessness of the enterprise. His sensations, therefore, were those rather of the gratified patriot than of the reluctant martyr,—a triumphant conviction that the good opinion of the people attended him to the stake, and that here, at least, his memory would live, not as a criminal, but as a benefactor.

And now the procession approached a point whence the blackened ruin of Ardmore, with its clump of tall beeches, became visible. Fergus gazed upon it long and eagerly, while his flushed cheek, and the involuntary distortion of his features, marked the intensity of the struggle which went on within. “ It would have been an act of humanity to have saved me

this," said he, speaking rather to himself than to those around ; " but no matter. One more pang, and all will be over."

" Take courage," whispered Parson Neil ; " bear up like a man and a Christian. The Southerns are around you now, and they must not see the slightest proof of weakness."

Fergus instantly averted his eyes, though it cost him no common exertion to do so, and, keeping them steadily fixed upon the ground, proceeded onwards without hazarding another observation.

A walk of less than half an hour's duration carried them round the little bay, of which we have already spoken as washing one side of the hill of Ardmore ; and a bend in the road shut out both the house and plantations from the view even of such as might have looked back in search of them. Fergus, as if a load had been removed from his mind, ventured to lift his eyes ; but the first object on which they rested, caused the blood to curdle in his veins, and his step, which had been hitherto firm and unyielding, began to totter. About a gun-shot in his front, on an eminence bare of underwood, stood a gibbet, from the cross-beam

of which a rope loosely dangled ; and around it lay or sat a second body of troops, as if guarding it from the aggressions of the country people. Fergus groaned audibly, as, with shackled hands, he seized the Parson's arm, who hastened to afford him such support and consolation as the fearful circumstances in which he stood, would allow.

“ One bold effort more,” whispered the Parson, “ and all will be over. Bear up ! bear up ! I beseech you, for your own sake, and for the sake of those who take the liveliest interest in your fate.”

“ I am not afraid,” replied he, “ not afraid to die :—but such a death ! God help me and support me ! it is more than I can face !”

Yet he did master his emotion, insomuch that, when the procession halted, the natural paleness was again over his cheek, and his voice, as he besought the respite of a few moments in which to perform his devotions, was firm and manly. The request was not denied him. On the green turf, and under his native skies, he kneeled down, while Neil proceeded to administer to him the sacrament, according to that beautiful form which the Episcopal Church of

Scotland has provided for those whose hours are numbered. There was not, in all the hardened group which surrounded him, one eye that beheld the spectacle with indifference ; and when, at the conclusion of the service, he rose, and pronounced himself ready, the very executioner shrank from his task. But the hesitation was only for a moment. “ Bear my last blessing to Marcella,” said Fergus, as he undid his stock, “ and tell her that I die innocent. I forgive my enemies ; and I require, with my last breath, that for this deed no reparation be sought.”

As he said this, his arms, released from the manacles, were pinioned behind his back, and, the rope being adjusted round his neck, he took his station on a little temporary platform, or stool, placed at the foot of the gallows. A brief interval followed ; when, on a signal given, the executioner dragged the stool from beneath his feet. There were a few desperate struggles, a heaving of the chest, and those convulsive movements of the limbs with which Nature marks her last efforts to sustain life ; and all was quiet. He swung a senseless corse between earth and heaven !

CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE the preparations for this atrocious act were in progress, the country-people, having assembled in increased numbers, took their stations along the side of the hill, and manifested, by their gestures, and an occasional burst of voices, that they were no indifferent observers of what was going on. More than once, indeed, a movement was made, as if an attempt at a rescue would be hazarded; but the display of military force was too imposing, and the enthusiasm of the moment died away. Thus it was till, his devotions being ended, Fergus placed himself under the fatal beam, and the executioner was seen to be employed

in the duties of his office. Then, however, there arose a yell so wild and shrill, as to startle the eagle from his nest on the far-off rock, while, as if actuated by one common impulse, the whole mass rushed madly downwards. In an instant the troops stood to their arms. The word was given to "make ready," and the muskets were levelled; but no shot was fired. The crowd, which acted without organization or control, wavered and stood still, while a few only of the most daring strove by gestures and example to lead them forward. But these remonstrated and exhorted in vain: one by one the multitude fell back, and the execution was completed without interruption. Nor was the slightest opposition offered to the fulfilment of that portion of the sentence which condemned the body to as much of public disgrace as can attach to a mass of senseless clay. The irons being adjusted to the limbs and joints, the carcase was fastened to the beam, and crowd and troops, except only a slight guard, meant rather to intimidate than to control the discontented, quitted the scene of death.

Our tale is wellnigh told: for, of the events

which marked the progress of the next quarter of a century, few were even remotely connected with the fortunes of Allan Breck ; or, as a necessary consequence, demand minute relation from his biographers. With respect to the other characters which have been introduced to a prominent place in this history, the leading occurrences in their lives are speedily narrated. Marcella, humanely kept in the dark as to her father's fate, continued to encourage the expectation of meeting him again, till Parson Neil, who made no delay in Strath Diarmid after witnessing the last moments of his patron, returned to undeceive her. That the blow, though long anticipated, fell with terrible weight at last, all who have watched the dying couch of a beloved object will believe ; indeed the first violence of her grief hindered the voice of consolation from being heard, and threatened seriously to affect either her life or her reason. But there is a buoyancy in youth which bears the truest mourner sooner or later above the tide of sorrow ; and from its happy influence, Marcella was not exempt.

She listened with gradually increasing com-

posure to the arguments of Parson Neil ; consented to avoid the spot where her father's body swung to the wind ; and permitted herself, after a brief interval, to be conducted to Cald-hame—where her reception was affectionate in the extreme. Here, amid scenes totally new, and in the society of her kind relatives, and faithful pastor, she slowly recovered her composure ; and learned to speak of past events, as the mariner speaks of the hardships which, during the progress of a stormy voyage, he may have undergone.

In the mean while, there were other parties on whom the passage of time wrought many and important changes. Throughout Strath Diarmid, a second military visitation spread an excess of misery far and near. The ancient occupiers of the soil, made subject to the grossest oppression, became either adventurers in distant parts, or serfs and menials at home ; while such as continued to maintain themselves in the abodes of their fathers, did so in despite of privations, under which the natives of any other country would have succumbed. Nor from the wretchedness which bowed the necks of her

kinsmen to the earth, was the mother of Allan exempt, though her sorrows sprang from a widely different source. Weeks, months, years elapsed ; yet of her son she received no tidings. No one could tell whither he had gone, no one seemed to care what his fate might be ; and hence, though a variety of rumours prevailed, they were all, to her at least, unsatisfactory, because they sprang equally from sources on which no reliance could be placed. Nevertheless, she bore up for a while in the confident expectation that time would yet solve the mystery ; till hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick, ate into her's with the virulence of a cancer. Not even once was she heard to express regret at the numerous evils which had befallen the tribe itself, nay, the execution of her brother-in-law drew from her no avowal of commiseration, and the name of Marcella she never mentioned. All her thoughts appeared, indeed, to be engrossed with one subject, till reason itself began to fail, and her very wishes became discordant and unnatural. Thus were nearly three years dragged on, during which her constitution gradually gave way ; and she

died as she had lived, caring for nothing, thinking of nothing, speaking of nothing, except her beloved son, and his unmerited misfortunes.

All this time, there was an individual in whose memory the occurrences of a single day dwelt with a degree of tenacity, for which he found it impossible to account. Frank Middleton, the young English officer, to whose kindness Marcellly stood so much indebted, ceased not to remember, with an interest which time scarcely served to diminish, the fair image that had crossed his path. He had seen her but seldom, it is true, and that amid scenes harrowing to the best feelings of his nature; yet the impression then made, proved to be at once deep and enduring, for it never faded away. Middleton happened to be left in command of the detachment, with which it was esteemed necessary to overawe that district of the Highlands. He was the only officer attached to the party, and being of an enterprising disposition, he devoted himself to acquire a knowledge of the people; and if he found them in some respects less civilized than the natives of Berkshire, he discovered also that

they possessed many of the noblest traits of national character. He saw that they were kind-hearted, hospitable to the extent of their means, grateful for kindnesses conferred upon them, and true to their plighted faith ; and as he studiously applied himself to deserve their confidence and good opinion, he succeeded, in spite of the anomalous situation in which he stood officially towards them. The consequence was, that he heard much of Marcella ; of her beauty, her excellence, her high-mindedness, and her generosity ; a circumstance to which, probably, may be attributed the duration of a sentiment which, in ordinary cases, might have been as transient as it was sudden. Be this, however, as it may, it is certain that the image of the fair girl, as she clung to him for protection, and thanked him for it when afforded, not only continued to occupy his thoughts, but day by day interested him more deeply ; and that he lingered where he was, long after his term of duty had expired, under the expectation, that sooner or later she would return. But the spring and the summer both elapsed without bringing back Marcella to her deso-

late home ; and Middleton, despairing of meeting her again, departed amid the general lamentations of a tribe which had begun to regard him as one of themselves.

It might be about two years posterior to these events, that Marcella, while crossing, on her way home, the Back Walk at Stirling, found herself suddenly confronted by a gentleman in a military uniform, whose features, a vague impression fell upon her mind, were not absolutely strange to her, and who evidently knew, and made haste to address her. The officer was Frank Middleton, now promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and commandant of the regiment which occupied Stirling Castle ; and still, strange to say, the worshiper of that divinity which an imagination more than commonly vivid had created. He lost not a moment in making himself known, and soliciting permission to cultivate her acquaintance ; nor could Marcella, consistently with the gratitude to which she believed that he was entitled, refuse to introduce him to her guardians. The result will doubtless be anticipated. An only son, though heir to a baronetcy, Colonel

Middleton found little difficulty in obtaining his father's consent to the match; and as a determination not to obtrude herself into any family, alone withheld the pledge which her heart had already given, Marcella, in due time, consented to make him happy. They married; Middleton quitted the army, and having, first of all, through his interest at court, obtained a reversal of the most degrading part of Fergus's sentence, removed with his bride to Ardmore. There, during some years, they lived happily, amid a tenantry reinstated by their means, objects of love and profound respect to all classes, whose welfare they assiduously promoted. Nor was it till the decease of Sir Edward imposed new duties upon his successor, that they once thought of entering into what is called the world. But an accession of rank, and the demands of his hereditary dependants, were claims which Sir Francis knew not how to resist. He henceforth divided his time between the two countries, spending the summer months generally in Scotland, and, except when called upon to attend his duties in Parliament, rendering his lady, for the remainder of the year, as acceptable to the honest boors of Berks as he had

himself become to the mountaineers of Strath Diarmid.

“Time ran his ceaseless course,” and wrought his customary changes, including the slaughter of Red Ranald in an affray with the excise, the death of Parson Neil at an advanced age, and the birth of sons and daughters to his new patron, when, in the year 1784, Sir Francis and Lady Middleton were induced, by motives of business or amusement, or both, to visit Paris. Up to that date the inquiries which from time to time they hazarded respecting the fate of Allan Breck had all ended in disappointment. They obtained, indeed, vague information of his having taken service under the Porte; nor were there wanting those who pretended to follow in the career of one or other of the most daring of the Pachas the fortunes of their kinsman; but these rumours, when traced to their source, proved invariably to be groundless. Speculation, indeed, ceased at last to busy itself about him, nor, as may readily be imagined, were Sir Francis and Lady Middleton very anxious to find it otherwise. That, however, which design had for so many years failed to effect, an accident brought about; and Allan

became again, in a certain sense, an object of interest to those with whom he had been so long and so fatally connected.

We have said that in 1784 Sir Francis and Lady Middleton visited Paris. Her father's fate, and the devotion of her clan, rendered the lady an object of strong attraction to the many loyal and honourable men who were then exiles in the French capital, all of whom received ready admission to the table of her husband. It chanced on a certain occasion that a gentleman of the *Garde du corps*, a relative of Lochiel, and of course an ally of the Clan Diarmid, spent an evening of more than common interest with Marcella and Sir Francis. They talked much of other days, and of scenes amid which their childhood was spent, and the cavalier's eyes not unfrequently filled as the reflection occurred that he should never visit those scenes again. "Yet I don't know," continued he; "I am not sure that I am justified in repining. Louis is exceedingly kind to us, and there are many that stand in need of his bounty. The corps of which I am a member is chiefly composed of us Jacobites,—and, by the same token, there is a

chevalier of your name, my Lady, who expresses a great desire to see you, yet seems reluctant to obtrude himself on your hospitality."

"I had hoped that there was no Scotchman in Paris, far less a Highlander, who would experience any reluctance to visit us," replied Marcellly: "let me beg of you to bring your friend here at as early an hour as may be convenient to you to-morrow."

The guardsman promised that he would fulfil his orders, and Sir Francis and his lady, on the departure of their guest, retired to rest, forgetful that any such conversation had passed.

They were at breakfast next morning, (and the breakfast-hour was then an early one,) when a servant informed them that a Chevalier of the *Garde du corps* was in waiting; that he refused to give his name, and requested that they would not inconvenience themselves, for he was in no hurry. Marcellly instantly recollected what had occurred between Mr. Cameron and herself, and concluding, of course, that it was her namesake who paid his visit thus early, desired that he might be immediately introduced. There was a pause of perhaps five minutes, at the end of

which the door opened, and there entered a tall, spare-made muscular man, his coat decorated with the insignia of various orders, with hair not grizzled, but white as silver, and a face hideously scarred and deformed with the small-pox. Lady Middleton cast one glance towards him, and then shrieking out Allan Breck, fell back upon her chair.

“Yes, Madam,” exclaimed the Chevalier, “I am Allan Breck,—the same whom you have learned to curse,—the same who knows not how, in this presence at least,—to pray for himself.”

“Go, my love; this is no fit scene for you,” interrupted Sir Francis, while he rose to lead his lady from the room: “if this person have aught to say to you, he must deliver his message through me. You can hold with him no conversation.”

“Oh, no! no!” cried Marcella, as averting her face she rose hastily and withdrew, while Sir Francis, placing himself between her and Allan, seemed to bar any attempt on the part of that desperate man to detain her. But in truth there was little need to take any pre-

caution against violence. Allan followed her only with a mournful gaze, his head falling upon his chest as the last flutter of her robe disappeared ; and then with difficulty sustaining himself, appeared for a moment to hesitate as to the course which it behoved him to pursue. At last, however, his composure seemed in some degree to recover, for he raised his eyes once more, and, fixing them upon Sir Francis, said,

“ It is but natural—I cannot blame her for it—though, indeed, I stand before you innocent of at least one great crime of which I have been accused. The death of Ardmore is not chargeable upon me ; I had no hand in it.”

“ No,” replied Sir Francis sternly, “ you were certainly no direct agent there ; but by whom was that foul assassination perpetrated, which caused not only the unjust execution of one innocent man, but the depopulation and misery of a whole district ?”

“ Not by me, as God shall show me mercy ! Sir, I am a guilty man, a miserable man—disgraced, outlawed, friendless, and self-condemned,—but in the slaughter of Duart I had no more hand than yourself. I know, indeed,

by whom that shot was fired ; and, when time shall have wrought a few more changes, it is my design, ere I die, to make his name public : but in the mean while considerations connected with the welfare of others keep me silent, even at the expense of bearing a little longer the odium which now attaches to me. Yet I make no merit of this, far less repine at it. Look at this uniform, adorned with these medals and decorations,—what, think you, does it cover ? See there,” tearing open his coat as he spoke, and exhibiting a hair shirt next to his skin ; that is but an emblem, a wretched emblem, of the degree of peace that dwells within—of the ceaseless throbbing of remorse which, day by day, and night by night, eats into my very vitals. Think you this head has grown grey with years ? No, sir, it has seen fewer winters than your own : but there is a busy fiend, called Conscience, that racks the brain from morning till evening, and withers up the moisture at its roots. Tell your lady that she has nothing to apprehend from me. I came only to see her once again, to obtain from her, if I could, that pardon which I may well despair of obtaining

from Heaven, and of assuring her, that in all my prayers—ay, and I do pray as often as the hours of six, eight, and twelve strike, both in light and in darkness—tell her, that in all my prayers, one petition is prominent,—that she may be happy with the man of her choice. You will convey to her this message, will you not?"

"Unhappy man!" replied Sir Francis; "if I could believe what you say——"

"Believe! yes, you may doubt me, if you will; you are justified in doing so; yet I beseech you, for the sake of that mercy in which you one day hope to participate, that you will not reject this, the last and only request that a heart-broken man has ever made to you!"

"I will repeat what you have stated, be assured," replied Sir Francis, involuntarily softened by the wildness of Allan's manner; "and I know that I may take it upon me to assure you of Lady Middleton's fullest and freest pardon. But for myself, I have to desire that you never again seek to cross her path, inasmuch as the associations connected with your presence necessarily recall events

which cannot fail to distress her, without doing the smallest good to any one."

" I thank you for this favour," answered Allan, as he slowly turned towards the door, " and willingly comply with your requisition. Farewell for ever ! But let me implore you, when the packet shall come to hand, which gives notice that Allan Breck is at rest, that you will yet redeem his memory from the only charge under which he knows not how to rest content. Blood there is on these hands, I freely admit ; but that of Duart and of Ardmore, the last particularly, lies not at my door ; and not for my soul's ransom would I have it there. Well, you grant this favour also ?"

" I will," answered Sir Francis.

" Then once again, farewell for ever !"

As he uttered this sentence, the Chevalier disappeared, and neither Sir Francis nor Lady Middleton ever saw him again !

Distrusting the promises of her relative, Marcellly urgently implored her husband to return to England without delay. He did not enter into these suspicions, but, ever anxious to

prevent her wishes, he issued orders to his servants, that they should make ready for a journey, and, on the second day, the family quitted Paris. They resumed their old habits, and betook themselves to their old haunts, both in England and Scotland ; in the enjoyments accompanying which, both Allan and his strange appearance were forgotten. Nor, for some time, did anything occur calculated to bring him and his promised confession back to their remembrance. But amid the great events with which soon afterwards all Europe rang, a circumstance occurred, which, though unnoticed, in all probability, by the rest of the world, excited a lively interest in their minds. The French Revolution began, and Sir Francis, who watched its progress with the eye of a politician and a Christian, suffered none of the minute circumstances that attended it to elude him. He read with avidity the endless details that were given, till the stream of history brought him down to the eventful 10th of August. The narrative of that day, deeply affecting in itself, was rendered doubly so to him, in consequence of the

honourable mention made in it of Allan Breck. On duty at the Tuilleries, the brave Chevalier was stated to have maintained his post with desperate resolution, till, weakened with loss of blood, and borne down by numbers, he was beaten to the earth, and made prisoner. A wild cry instantly arose, “To the lantern! to the lantern!” and Allan Breck, already more than half dead with his wounds, expired upon the scaffold!

Long and anxiously Sir Francis looked for the arrival of the packet which had been promised: but it never came. It doubtless perished in the confusion of those stormy times; and the consequence has been, that over the murder of Duart a veil of mystery still hangs, which is not now likely to be raised for ever.

THE END.

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